

RIVERWATCH

The Official Newsletter of POTOMAC **RIVERKEEPER**® NETWORK

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VIRGINIA CONSERVA-
TION NETWORK

RIVERPALOOZA 2019 IS HERE!



DON'T MISS THESE FUN PADDLES ON THE BEAUTIFUL POTOMAC AND SHENANDOAH RIVERS!

We are thrilled to unveil our RiverPalooza 2019 schedule for river connoisseurs and those who love the Potomac River and its tributaries! *RiverPalooza* is a two-month long annual festival where families and river enthusiasts can experience memorable on-the-water experiences that build a deep and enduring appreciation for our rivers. Scheduled between June 14 and August 24, they range from snorkeling on the Shenandoah to overnight camping on the Potomac's beautiful Paw Paw Bends to historic Mallows Bay.

No other event of its kind offers as wide a range of on-the-water and paddling events. RiverPalooza's canoe outings, fishing excursions, camping trips, kayak adventures, snorkeling, and floats for all skill levels make it a popular series of events for all ages. From rare opportunities to explore the historic water trails that Captain John Smith first voyaged in the early 1600s, to the Potomac Heritage Trail that follows the paths explored by George Washington, the events deliver unique experiences that inspire a sense of stewardship and reverence for the Potomac watershed.

If you've participated, we are eager to see you again this year and make sure that you bring some friends.

- June 14, Fri. Women on the Water (Poolesville, MD)
- June 27, Thu. Antietam Creek (Sharpsburg, MD)
- July 11, Thu. Monuments Paddle (Washington, DC)
- July 12, Fri. & Sat. Paw Paw Bends Overnight (Little Orleans, MD)
- July 17, Wed. Ghost Fleet, Mallows Bay (Nanjemoy, MD)
- July 19, Fri. Snorkeling on the Shenandoah (Bentonville, VA)
- July 20, Sat. Piscataway Kanoi American Indian Tribe Paddle (Indian Head, MD)
- July 21, Sun. RioPalooza (Elkton, VA)
- Aug. 24, Sat. RiverPalooza Blowout (Harpers Ferry, WV)



Beautiful and historic Antietam Creek



EarthShare/CFC #87828

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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



HELLO FRIENDS,

I've met people who don't like winter, but I've never met anyone who didn't like spring, especially around here. Spring is such a wonderful season for us – redbud in the Shenandoah, cherry blossoms along the Tidal Basin in DC, mountain laurel in West Virginia,

and mountain streams teeming with fish flowing throughout the watershed. For many of us, spring also means getting back onto or into the rivers and streams we love so much.

For Potomac Riverkeeper Network, spring also means preparing for our annual RiverPalooza series of paddling events – read more about that in these pages. And this year, please join us! There is something for everyone, from historical tours, to snorkeling, to scenic trips, to just plain fun paddling. Many trips sell out, so please sign up early to be sure you get a seat.

This spring started out particularly well with the launch of *Sea Dog*, our new Chesapeake Bay Deadrise that we will use to protect the Potomac River. At our launch event at National Harbor, we were joined by about 50 of our supporters to re-christen *Sea Dog*, a gift from Adm. J. Paul Reason and his wife, Dianne, which will be our floating laboratory for the most extensive water and bacteria monitoring we have ever done. We thank them and we also thank the

Peterson family for donating the slip where she will be moored at the National Harbor.

I spent the winter meeting lots of new people as I continue my journey to learn how we can best protect the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. I've been asked, and enthusiastically agreed, to make presentations to groups all over the watershed, to tell the story of Potomac Riverkeeper Network and the work we do. I've been to film festivals where I have spoken about the threat to clean water that would result from ending longstanding protections for headwaters and wetlands under Environmental Protection Agency's rollback of the Clean Water Rule. And I was pleased to be included in a panel to discuss what we need to do to address toxic algal outbreaks – a key cause of fish kills in the Shenandoah.

It was a busy spring here at PRKN. But you can be sure that we will be out on the water patrolling, investigating, monitoring, and taking action to stop pollution, making sure our rivers and streams are safe for all of us to enjoy. Please help us out by letting us know if you see a plume or a spill that we should check out.

Let's do great things together!

Sincerely,

Nancy Stoner, President

SEA DOG WATER MONITORING PROGRAM!

Potomac Riverkeeper Network has launched the *Sea Dog*, a 42-foot Chesapeake Deadrise! This beautiful and functional vessel will enhance PRKN's capability to protect and defend the Potomac River and will be used to patrol, do water quality monitoring, and serve as a floating classroom for environmental education.

We are so excited about the programming that we can do with it to show off our greatest asset – the Potomac River – and to step up our efforts to find and stop pollution so that the river and everyone who uses it can thrive.

Want to get involved? Funding is critical to purchase needed equipment such as sampling kits, safety gear, and training materials for our volunteers. A gift of \$50 will purchase three sampling kits; a gift of \$500 will purchase educational materials for the floating classroom or fuel for the boat; a gift of \$5,000 will support testing for one year at your favorite recreational spot on the river!



Our testing equipment on the *Sea Dog*



Our beautiful *Sea Dog*

Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a proud member of both EarthShare Mid-Atlantic and Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Employees can choose to designate a portion of their paycheck to Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Our EarthShare and our CFC number is the same – #87828.

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER®

COAL ASH VICTORY IN VIRGINIA!



As your Potomac Riverkeeper, I'm thrilled to announce our hard-fought victory on coal ash pollution in Virginia! In March, the Governor signed historic legislation that requires the recycling or safe landfill disposal of 28 million tons of toxic coal ash from four Dominion Energy sites, including nearly five million tons at Possum Point on the Potomac. Coal ash stored in unlined waste ponds at these sites has been polluting our rivers and local communities' drinking water for decades, and despite this shameful history, Dominion was planning only to place a cap on top of the waste ponds, leaving the ash to continue to leach into and contaminate nearby waters with arsenic, lead and selenium for the foreseeable future. Our action to start a grassroots campaign and build a movement to demand a legislative solution to coal ash in Virginia stopped that from happening.

In 2015, I discovered illegal discharges from the Possum Point coal ash storage pond near Quantico. Further investigation revealed that drinking wells of nearby residents were contaminated with heavy metals such as arsenic, selenium, and lead. More recent study showed that radium was present as well.

We mobilized to alert the Prince William County Board of Supervisors that a pending solid waste permit for the site should be denied – the results were fantastic. We allied with them and built solid long lasting friendships with local residents whose drinking water was directly impacted by Possum Point's coal ash ponds.

Our focus then turned to Richmond, where we, with our partners such as Southern Environmental Law Center and Virginia Conservation Network, educated state legislators on the dangers of coal ash and the need for a permanent solution. Dominion had already started its work to persuade them that “cap in place” – simply covering the storage ponds – was the solution. But we understood that a better solution was both necessary and available – recycling the ash into concrete.

In 2017, we succeeded in passing legislation that imposed a moratorium on closing any of the storage ponds until Dominion did more investigation about the practicality of recycling. We already knew the answer, of course, but we were glad for the moratorium so that we could commission a report that would demonstrate that recycling was feasible.

And during the 2018 legislative session, Senator Scott Surovell and Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy introduced bills that required recycling or safe landfilling of all 28 million tons of coal ash in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. January 2019 started out great for us when the Governor, leading legislators, our partners, and even Dominion reached a bipartisan agreement that was passed by both houses of the General Assembly and signed by the Governor.

Such a great example of coalition building and grassroots development – I was proud to be a part of it!



No one can energize a crowd like Dean!



Dean describes the history of the fight as we celebrate this win together!

A lot of what I do as Potomac Riverkeeper is to be the eyes and ears of the river. And so it was recently when I had gotten a tip from an angler that there was a fuel spill in Four Mile Run. That could mean only one thing – fuel was entering it somewhere. I investigated and found a disgusting sheen on the waterway. So I contacted authorities in Alexandria, Arlington, the Coast Guard, and Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality. The Arlington Fire Department put booms in place, but they didn't identify the source of the spill. This sort of incident is squarely the responsibility of Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality but they did not do what I did – go out on the river and trace the spill upstream until I found the source – a pipe discharging directly into the stream.

SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER[®]

MUSKIE FISHING ON THE SHENANDOAH

Although many anglers rightfully worry about this year's fishing season on the Potomac, we are happy to say that is not the case on the Shenandoah River, especially for muskies. In early February, Shenandoah Riverkeeper Mark Frondorf assisted Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries personnel in their annual assessment of muskies in the Shenandoah River. They found a thriving musky population, with good numbers overall, including quite a few large fish.

The details of the annual survey are pretty interesting. Using electro shocking, which temporarily stuns the fish, Mark and the biologists quickly weighed, measured length, examined the overall condition of the fish, and collected any tagging information before returning them to the river. The biggest fish was right around 48" in length. Most of the fish were in the mid-30 inch range.

There are several reasons for the thriving population according to Mark. First, he says that muskies are not overfished as are some other species. Interestingly, the lures used by most anglers are simply too small to interest the bigger musky.

In addition, the Shenandoah offers nearly ideal conditions for muskies. Deep water pools bordered by shallow riffles that the musky really appreciates are found throughout the Shenandoah. Throw in lots of forage fish and you have a happy musky. The Shenandoah has a very healthy population of suckers averaging 12" to 18", a perfect eating size for muskies.

Instead of giving you precise location coordinates, which would make things oh so boring, just remember that when it comes to musky lures or flies, go big or go home, says Mark. A 48" fish is mighty big, but then so is a 30 incher. Mark suggests anglers plan accordingly and good luck!



Doing what fish biologists do -- measure!



One of the Shenandoah's mighty muskies



A musky -- up close!



Here's what Mark is working to protect



They can grow big on the Shenandoah!

SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER'S UNIQUE EXPERTISE RECOGNIZED

Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, is known for his quiet and effective approach to protecting and defending the Shenandoah river and his unique abilities are recognized throughout the watershed, including his unmatched knowledge of smallmouth bass. So much so that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Freshwater Fisheries Program invited him to participate in a program on the current status of the smallmouth bass population.

Maryland undertook a pilot smallmouth bass supplemental stocking program on the upper Potomac River this spring to combat projected dwindling smallmouth populations. While the current number of catchable size smallmouth bass has remained steady, many, like Mark and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources, are concerned about likely future declines after several years of poor year-classes of young fish. Mark regards Maryland's adoption of the supplemental stocking program as both encouraging and troubling – encouraging because the state is acting but troubling because it doesn't seem to be working yet.

The program collected adult smallmouth bass from the Potomac River and transported them to state hatchery spawning ponds near Waldorf, MD. The goal was to use the resulting small fry as the source for supplemental stocking to help boost year-class strength and contribute to the overall population. Unfortunately, the fish failed to spawn in the hatchery environment. Mark surmises that because the smallmouth in the Potomac are "Ohio strain," they need moving water in order to spawn. Moving water cleans their nests and affords increasing water temperatures. He suggests a couple of solutions for the future implementation of the program. One would be to use "Great Lakes strain" which spawn well in still water environments or to engineer the spawning ponds so that there is moving water for those native Potomac River smallmouth.

Mark is eager to play an active role in this program so that anglers will continue to have access to excellent bass fishing in the Potomac River for years to come.

UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER[®]

UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER TAKES ACTION TO ADDRESS UNAUTHORIZED DISCHARGE INTO TROUT STREAM

Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, and Potomac Riverkeeper Network have notified Specialty Granules, Inc., of our intention to bring a citizen's suit under the Clean Water Act to stop unpermitted mining waste discharges that degrade Miney Branch and threaten Tom's Creek in Adams County, Pennsylvania, both tributaries of the Monocacy River. Brent is also working with a local group, Friends of Tom's Creek, to oppose a permit renewal for Specialty Granules because the project will involve blasting and excavation next to people's homes and within 300 feet of Tom's Creek; together, they have presented a petition to Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf to urge him to deny the permit.

Specialty Granules produces a grit for the production of asphalt shingles. It mines a substance called Greenstone at its facility near Fairfield, PA. Greenstone is known to contain naturally occurring asbestos, a carcinogenic material hazardous to human health, whose crushing process introduces contaminants into the air and water. Part of this mining process discharges water with suspended solids into sediment ponds. Brent's investigation reveals ongoing point source discharges into Miney Branch and an adjacent wetland that cause a white to green cloud.

These discharges threaten Tom's Creek, which is a high-value trout stream. Neighboring property owners in contact with Brent have stated that these discolorations have persisted since at least 2010, have become more frequent over time, and are worst for a period of approximately one to two weeks after rainfalls. Brent also has evidence that Specialty Granules is discharging suspended solids from the base of its sediment pond through one or more natural and/or engineered discharge points. Discharges from these points have also caused a white to green cloud in Miney Branch and the adjacent wetland area. These discharges are not authorized by Specialty Granules' permit granted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and therefore he believes constitute unlawful, unpermitted discharges in violation of the Clean Water Act.

These illegal discharges pollute Miney Branch with solids from the mining activity that cloud the water, affecting trout and other aquatic life that depend on clear, cool water and contributing to the pollution of the Monocacy and Potomac Rivers downstream. The Clean Water Act requires and we deserve better.



Tom's Creek -- it deserves our protection!



This is the damaging discharge in Miney Branch



The drone captures this image of SGI's mining operation



Brent his new best friend - the drone! Photo credit DC Media Group

Brent's newest campaign to save pristine Tom's Creek in Adams County, Pennsylvania, is a great example of his drone expertise as well as his extensive knowledge of hydrology. First, the photos which documented the pollution were taken from his drone. And second, Brent is using his scientific understanding of what a solution to this problem should look like. Good work, Brent! You're doing what no one else can do!

WATER QUALITY MONITORING AND HOW IT WORKS

At Potomac Riverkeeper Network, we believe strongly that everyone should be able to safely use and enjoy the rivers we work so hard to protect. What could be nicer than a swim in the refreshing waters of the Potomac on a hot summer day? But we don't want people to go into the water if it is not safe to do so. For years it has been illegal to swim in the Potomac River in Washington, DC because of high levels of bacteria that make it unsafe at times for swimmers, paddleboarders, and others coming in direct contact with the river. When it rains, sewage from homes and businesses combines with polluted stormwater and overflows, discharging raw sewage into the Potomac River. Storm drains flush pet waste, fertilizers, pesticides, and trash into the Potomac River, posing a serious risk to public health and negatively impacting recreational opportunities.

In our Swimmable Potomac Campaign, we are working to lift the ban on swimming and to make bacterial monitoring data available so that people know when it is safe to swim. So we are embarking on a summer-long campaign to obtain samples of DC, Maryland, and Virginia waters and test them for bacterial contamination. And we're using the brand new laboratory equipment installed on our new research vessel, the *Sea Dog*, to incubate and analyze the samples! Our work is supported by a wide array of donors and funders. Our volunteer monitoring program started in May and will run to mid-September 2019. Testing takes place on Wednesdays or Thursdays and the data is posted on a smartphone application called Swim Guide every Friday, so that the public has up-to-date information on water quality.

POTOMAC RIVER CITIZEN SCIENCE VOLUNTEER WATER QUALITY MONITORING FOR MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA WATERS

With the generous support of the Virginia Environmental Endowment, Peterson Companies, National Harbor Marina, SP Marine Management, and Hunting Creek Garden Club, Potomac Riverkeeper Network is initiating a citizen science monitoring program in Virginia and Maryland to gather data on the status of the Potomac River. The program is modeled on a 2018 Anacostia Riverkeeper citizen science program funded by DC's Department of Energy and Environment under which Potomac Riverkeeper monitors several sites in the Potomac. With thousands of people interacting with and recreating on Maryland and Virginia waters each year, it's essential for the public to have current information about the water's quality that may directly affect their well-being and health.

Volunteers will collect water samples where people frequently recreate and analyze those samples for bacterial contamination. Sample analysis that will take place on our new floating laboratory, the *Sea Dog* – a 42-foot Chesapeake Deadrise housed at National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Maryland. Our vessel is outfitted with an onboard laboratory, the IDEXX Colilert System, to measure *E. coli*. This type of bacteria serves as a water quality parameter for human health in recreational waters. We will compare the results from our sampling with the Virginia public health and safety standards to determine whether each site currently meets the health standards for *E. coli*. Our long-term goal is to use our floating laboratory to help expand our volunteer water quality program to communities further down river.

CITIZEN SCIENCE VOLUNTEER WATER QUALITY MONITORING FOR WASHINGTON, DC WATERS

With funding from the DC Department of Energy and Environment, we are also partnering with Anacostia Riverkeeper, Audubon Naturalist Society, Rock Creek Conservancy, and Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to routinely test multiple sites for *E. coli* levels. The results, like those for the samples from Maryland and Virginia waters, will also be made available to the public every Friday through the free website and smartphone app, SwimGuide so river users know when the river is safe for primary human contact and when it is not! This monitoring initiative is one step towards our ultimate goal of making the river swimmable for all to use and enjoy!



A trained volunteer testing water sample aboard the Sea Dog



Our trained citizen scientists at work



This is why we're working on water quality monitoring



Volunteers gathering at National Harbor for water sampling training

VIRGINIA CONSERVATION NETWORK – A MUCH VALUED PARTNER

Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a leading clean water advocate fighting to protect and restore the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, but we almost never go it alone. Much of our strength comes from our partnerships with other environmental advocates and coalitions, on whom we rely for support in all the work we do. A prime example is our recent coal ash victory in Virginia, which would never have happened without the support of the Virginia Conservation Network. This is the first in a series of partner profiles we'll be featuring in Riverwatch, to showcase the diverse and powerful organizations we team up with to fight for clean water.

Founded in 1969, Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) began as a roundtable of major conservation groups and has grown to include over 100 Network Partners across the Commonwealth, including Potomac Riverkeeper Network. VCN is committed to building a powerful, diverse, and highly coordinated conservation movement focused on protecting the Commonwealth's natural resources.

VCN is a facilitator of strategic action, a resource for Network Partners statewide, and a constant conservation presence in Virginia's Capital. We frequently look to VCN's lobbying team for insights in developing our approach to our own legislative strategies in Richmond and across the state. Playing a unique role in Virginia's conservation community, VCN helps the community speak with one coordinated voice. The organization and its staff focus on strengthening the conservation community as a whole and winning environmental victories that benefit all Virginians.

VCN's Network Partners work on a wide range of issues from stream restoration to transportation reform to renewable energy advancement to promoting sustainable community growth and more. Given the diverse work of our partner organizations, VCN organizes its programs into three main categories: Healthy Rivers, Clean Energy, and Green Communities.

The education role played by VCN is critical to growing both legislative and grassroots support for our efforts. The group's annual Environmental Briefing Book is a must read for anyone committed to Virginia environmental causes. From global issues such as climate change to local ones such as oyster restoration, the scientific foundation of their report and their policy recommendations is a truly valuable resource.

VCN is proud to serve as the state lead for the Choose Clean Water Coalition — the regional coalition advocating for clean rivers and streams in communities throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed — and as the Virginia state affiliate for the National Wildlife Federation.

Potomac Riverkeeper Network has a long history of working with VCN and its leaders and we cherish the relationship. This more recent effort in finally resolving the Commonwealth's long-standing coal ash pollution problem is a wonderful demonstration of how well we work together and how we will continue to do so for the benefit of all Virginians and the Commonwealth's incredible natural resources.



Water Workgroup



POTOMAC
RIVERKEEPER®
NETWORK

3070 M Street NW
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LAW & WATER

A GALA EVENT TO BENEFIT

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

It's not too early to SAVE THE DATE
for our 2019 Law & Water Gala!

Please plan to join us Friday, Oct. 25th in
the Waterside Room overlooking the
Potomac River at the glamorous new
Intercontinental Washington, DC - The
Wharf, the hottest new waterfront
development in DC.



Law & Water 2019 Gala Friday, October 25, 2019

We are pleased to announce that Maude Barlow, world renowned and passionate advocate for the public's right to clean and safe water, will be our keynote speaker this year. Maude is the Chair of the Council of Canadians, Canada's largest public advocacy organization, and founder of the Blue Planet Project. In 2005, Maude was awarded Sweden's Right Livelihood Award (the "Alternative Nobel") for her work in the water justice movement. Maude currently serves on the World Future Council and as Board Chair for Food and Water Watch.

Interested in becoming a Law & Water Sponsor?
Contact Jennifer Galloway jennifer@prknetwork.org
or call 571-305-1599.