

RIVERWATCH

The Official Newsletter of POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

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Today is a time of great sadness in our country. It is a time of fear and of pain for many across the globe, including many in our Potomac Riverkeeper Network family. Our hearts go out to those dealing with the scourge of Covid-19.

At a difficult time like this, we look for sources of comfort – of solace. Like many of you, I find solace in nature. I find solace in the gurgling of streams, the sound of birds singing, in sprouts springing up from the ground, in trees leafing out, and the smell of the forest.

As you know, clean water is essential to life. The natural world cannot exist without it. Our rivers and the tributaries that flow into them are the lifeblood of nature.

We enjoy the bounty of a clean Potomac River because of the foresight of a small but dedicated group of local river enthusiasts and environmentalists 20 years ago who recognized the need for a stronger voice for the Potomac River and stepped up to be that voice. Those visionaries formed the Potomac Riverkeeper, now Potomac Riverkeeper Network.

20 years later, you and I are the beneficiaries of the good work that Ed Merrifield, the first Potomac Riverkeeper, Dean Naujoks and Brent Walls on the Potomac, and Mark Frondorf, the Shenandoah Riverkeeper, have done to stop toxic pollution from leaking coal ash pits, sewage from combined sewer overflows, and lead from an abandoned shooting range. Over 20 years, those individual actions add up. They add up to rivers that are beautiful, bountiful, and majestic. The kind of river that gives us solace in times like these.



Unimaginable beauty – photo credit Skip Brown



Our board member, Peter Bross, showing the way



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A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

I LOVE MY JOB – STILL



HELLO FRIENDS,

Yes, even now, I love my job. It is a difficult time to run a small nonprofit – or a small business – or one of the many other types of entities affected by Covid-19. We all feel the impact. But the work the Potomac Riverkeeper Network does is more important now than ever before.

With so many other options closed for recreation, people are looking for ways to relieve their stress, to regain their balance, and – dare I say it in these difficult times – to have fun. Clean, safe river recreation won't make Covid-19 disappear, but it can relieve the stress of those taking care of the sick, providing other essential services, and social distancing to protect others. With your help, we can continue to make beautiful, clean rivers available to you.

At Potomac Riverkeeper Network, as we have had to make work and lifestyle changes, we are still daily about the business of protecting and defending our precious rivers and waterways. Riverkeepers are still investigating tips, while complying with all orders from governmental authorities; we are still filing comments on ill-conceived proposed regulations; and we are still filing lawsuits to stop polluters.

I'm proud of the work being done, of the staff doing it, and of the many, many partners throughout the watershed who work with us to accomplish our goals. I love my job.

As I write these words, no one knows when our ordeal will end, nor do we know the final cost. But I'm an optimistic person, and I feel confident that America will recover and rebound. I have hope

that the experience we have all shared will teach us what and who are important to us. I have never wavered from my commitment to friends and family, and to the goal of cleaner, more abundant water for all of us.

I think about what sacrifices we have had to make during the pandemic – stay at home, distance ourselves from loved ones, and care for the sick. And I'm aware that that's not possible for all of us. There are many people in the Potomac watershed

for whom the features of remote communication are not easy, and sometimes not even possible. Many are suffering financially, even if they don't contract the virus. And Covid-19 most aggressively devastates the lives and the health of those who have the most challenges – the elderly, the immuno-compromised, those with the most medical risk and the least ability to protect themselves from others infected with Covid-19.

Many in our watershed do not have reliable access to clean water; many rely on our rivers for subsistence fishing; many live downstream of polluting industries; and many don't have the ear of those governmental authorities charged to protect them from pollution.

But Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a voice

for everyone in our watershed. We'll continue the fight for swimmable, drinkable, and fishable waters, and for those benefits to be enjoyed by everyone in the watershed – Clean Water For All.

Let's do great things together!

Sincerely,

Nancy Stoner, President



Nancy Stoner



Dean investigating pollution from sediment runoff – a main source of pollution in the River and the Bay

FORMER PRKN PRESIDENT STARTS BUSINESS, PLEDGES 5%



Thank goodness for Jeff at the helm



A cheerful bunch – courtesy of Ashby Gap Adventures



The next Ashby Gap Adventure generation

Hello old friends! I can't believe it's been almost two years since I've written to you, and since I retired from Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Most of you know that I left the organization to get back into the river outfitting business which I stepped away from in 2005 to start Shenandoah Riverkeeper.

Ironically, and perhaps predictably, it's been during the 15-year hiatus from my life as a river guide that I've grown MORE appreciative of the rivers and of my time on them. But as the years passed, I've been seeing less and less of the river. A fact that seems to be true for everyone I talk to, even the most avid and ardent river lovers. Nobody seems to be complaining that they get TOO MUCH river time.

So when Erika and I were planning our new business, our driving force was to help people with less time, and/or less gear, get back on the river. And thus, Ashby Gap Adventures (www.AshbyGapAdventures.com) was born in Boyce, VA in 2019. Please think of us the next time you're at a loss for what to do over the weekend, or if you have out-of-town guests and are looking for an alternative to "the monuments".

Let me tell you a little bit about how we do it. Not only have we cherry-picked (from many hundreds of miles of water) the prettiest, and least-trafficked portions of the river, but we have custom designed "one-of-a-kind" boats to take you on these unique eco-tours. Our guests can just sit back and enjoy themselves if they don't want to paddle. "We do the work, you do the fun" is the motto we are living by and we're putting the fun back in camping and rafting by turning the dials up to more of a "glamping" level. We're the first in the area to provide these kinds of services. We're also the first business to pledge 5% of our revenue to support river protection.

And we're excited to have the entire Kelble family involved. If you follow our Instagram or Facebook (@ashbygapadventures) you know our girls Sydney and Sabrina have learned to row our six-guest rafts,

and are in charge of designing our merchandise. Erika has taken over the food department, from snacks to lunch for day trips, to the preparation of ridiculously tasty camp-fire meals for our overnights. We took 2019 to develop and launch the business and run some adventures to work out the kinks. Now during the 2020 season, when we begin to emerge from our quarantine, we're ready to fill a schedule.

I've been dying to write PRKN members and share our news, but I never imagined we'd all be in quarantine when I did. Today is around our 40th day in isolation, and many of you are probably having the same thoughts and discussions Erika and I are. Questions like what lasting effect will this period of deprivation and reflection have on people? Will it have any effect at all? Has there ever been a moment like this in history? A moment where the world is put on pause and people are handed an involuntary reset button. Many, I think, will come out of this with a renewed sense of balance and priorities. I know I will. For me, this has been a unique chance to be home with my girls after really being away working intensely for the past 15 years. I'm going to come out of this determined to keep the same quality of family time, if not quantity. As someone with urban and apartment-bound family and friends, this quarantine has also reinforced the importance of the outdoors and nature in our lives. If you find yourself with the time, please take a moment to drop me a line--even if it's just to say hi and let me know you read my article. Or, let me know if you have a time when you'd like to come out to the valley to see what Ashby Gap Adventures does. We've worked out ways to navigate social distancing and look forward to helping you spend time outdoors on one of our amazing rivers. Now more than ever I am driven to help others get out and enjoy the places I love and have fought for. Now more than ever we need to enjoy our friends, our families, and the great rivers we're blessed to share.

Sincerely, Jeff Kelble. See you on the river!

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER[®]

WATER QUALITY MONITORING TO ENSURE A SWIMMABLE POTOMAC – WHY IT'S EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THIS YEAR

The Swimmable Potomac Campaign is a signature feature of Potomac Riverkeeper Network and it was, and is, an important step toward lifting the swimming ban in DC as well as making the Potomac safe for all of us.

The Water Quality Monitoring Program, started last year and continuing this year as we make adjustments to comply with safety guidelines, is even more critical than ever this summer for two reasons: first, because there will be a lot of people wanting to go in the water if public swimming pools and state park beaches remain closed or crowded; and, second, because people will be very interested in getting information about the public risks of recreation activities, including swimming in polluted water.

While people may be more concerned about contracting Covid-19 than gastroenteritis, contact with the river is much, much more likely to result in the latter than the former. This program can get timely, accurate information to the public, and the monitoring we

do for E. coli will be the best surrogate for potential Covid-19 risk (which is very small) as well as for gastroenteritis.

A hallmark of the Water Quality Monitoring Program is the certified reliability of its data, and that is only possible because of the rigorous training our volunteer citizen scientists receive. This year, the scheduled in-person training had to be canceled, but Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, and Carl Scheider, his incredibly dedicated and gifted volunteer coordinator, left to action and created three virtual training sessions for this year's volunteers.

And we need more volunteers! Last year's successes enabled us to add a new site at Mallows Bay, the new National Marine Sanctuary, in addition to the seven sites we monitor in DC in partnership with the Anacostia Riverkeeper, and two sites in Alexandria and one in National Harbor. If you are interested in participating this summer with very rigorous safety precautions to ensure your safety, please contact us at volunteer@prknetwork.org.



Sharkfest – supporting the Special Olympics



Sea Dog lab in use



Volunteer testing the Potomac

SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER®

RESPECT THE SHENANDOAH



The Shenandoah was made for a day like this!

The Shenandoah River and its Valley have long been regarded as among the most beautiful and majestic natural features of America. But for many reasons, the river has suffered over the last few decades. Fish kills and algal outbreaks, both associated with manure from unfenced cattle and large poultry operations, made the river unhealthy and unpleasant for those hoping to enjoy it. And so Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, is launching the Respect the Shenandoah Campaign.

The goal is to return the Shenandoah River to the condition of health and beauty that many of us remember from days gone by when there were healthy fish populations and clear, clean water for paddling and swimming. This is not just a dream. There are solutions that can be put in place by people of good will throughout the Valley that will enable the Valley to prosper economically as well as environmentally. Through the Shenandoah Compact process, which you read about in the Riverwatch Newsletter over the winter, Mark was able to bring people across the watershed together around a vision for a clean, healthy river. The Respect the Shenandoah launches that shared vision.

Reducing harmful algal blooms so they no longer interfere with river use and enjoyment is one of the major goals of this campaign. Getting cattle out of the river is a vital first step to achieving that goal. Mark's efforts in Richmond this year were successful, for he and his fellow Riverkeepers across the Commonwealth, with critical and welcome support from Gov. Northam, were able to pass legislation to get the cattle out, and to help farmers with some much needed funding to erect fences and create nutrient management programs to keep manure on the crops and out of the river.

The dramatic increase in poultry production farming has also resulted in excess application of poultry manure on farm fields. The soil's inability to absorb the manure leads to nutrient pollution in the Shenandoah, and so another goal of the Respect the Shenandoah campaign will be to establish regulations to limit poultry manure application to match crop needs.

The Shenandoah has been under stress for so long that many new to the river no longer remember what a healthy river looks like. Through a public awareness and information campaign, Mark will work to change that. Once his fellow Valley residents, and visitors, understand what was, and is therefore possible again, he hopes to mobilize everyone who comes in contact with or relies on the Shenandoah to return it to its former glory.

Last year, Mark and Alan Lehman, Program Manager for Potomac Riverkeeper Network in the Valley, together filed more than 60 complaints of nuisance algal blooms with Virginia authorities. This work is labor-intensive, but necessary, so that regulators and legislators in Richmond know the pervasiveness of the problem. Mark is hoping

that through his outreach program, he will be able to engage other river users to file complaints as well. The more the Department of Environmental Quality hears from those on the ground – and in the water – the more likely it will take action. For the casual river user, reporting is easy – just download the Water Reporter smartphone app on your phone, and let Mark know when you see an algal outbreak, an uncovered pile of poultry manure, or a herd of cattle in the river. This kind of assistance is tremendously valuable to Mark.

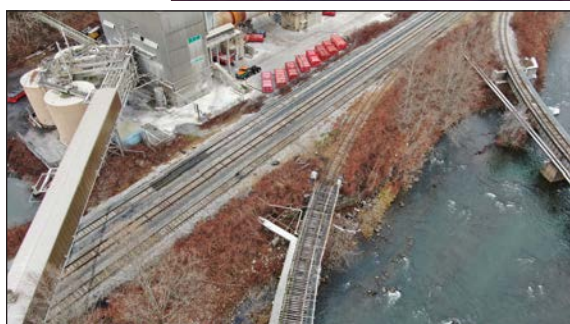
The Respect the Shenandoah Campaign relies on everyone who wants a cleaner, healthier Shenandoah – and that means every one of us – to take action!

UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER[®]

DRONES – CHANGING THE WAY RIVERKEEPERS WORK

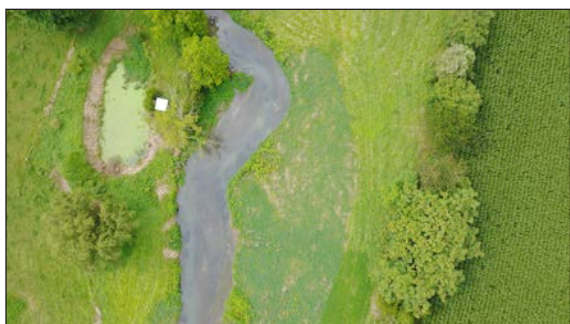


Using a drone
for aerial
investigation



Central
Chemical
Superfund site
showing
hot spots

Verso Mill
Black Liquor



Mettiki coal
operations in
western
Maryland

Algae
investigation in
Mossy Creek

The world is changing fast, but sometimes for the better. That's true for Riverkeepers, because thanks to Brent Walls, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper, they are learning about how to use drones as an innovative patrolling tool for water pollution.

More than two years ago, Brent, who doesn't mind being called a technology geek, got a drone, studied its use, and passed the FAA 107 test required for drone operators. And don't think for a minute that the license is a simple thing to obtain; it takes real study. It's important, especially for Brent, because his proximity to the Nation's Capital means that when flying his drone, he needs to be especially careful not to interfere with no fly zones, in addition to operating the drone safely in controlled airspace. But once he got his license, he instantly started using his drone across the Upper Potomac watershed to identify and investigate sources of pollution that could be observed from the public airspace.

Since he started relying on the drone, Brent has obtained footage of discharges from the mining operation at Specialty Granules, Inc., in Pennsylvania, where his evidence convinced the company to install state-of-the-art filtration systems to fix the problem. He has obtained compelling photos of the Hagerstown Central Chemical Superfund site, which he is using to urge EPA to provide safeguards before embarking on proposed changes that would allow contaminated groundwater to drain untreated into the river. In West Virginia, Brent is carefully monitoring the Mountaineer Gas Pipeline near Martinsburg, stormwater ponds associated with shale mining, and surface mining operations. In Maryland, his drone footage of the Verso paper mill plant in Luke was the basis for a Notice of Intent to sue, and he is also making sure that the operations at Mettiki Coal in western Maryland comply with Clean Water Act requirements.

PRKN's Riverkeepers often work as a team to investigate pollution incidents. Brent has flown the drone to help Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, to hunt down algae sources in the Shenandoah and to help Dean Naujoks, Potomac Riverkeeper, obtain invaluable footage of coal ash contamination at the Morgantown, MD coal plant.

When Mark and Dean saw how useful the drone can be to their work, they didn't need any more persuading. Through the generosity of the second generation of the Peterson Family Foundation, our "Potomac Spy" drone fleet has grown to three. Brent is training Mark and Dean for their FAA Remote Drone Pilot Certification. In addition, he is producing a series of virtual training videos to instruct his fellow Waterkeepers on the basics of how to use a drone, how to use it for advocacy and legal purposes, and how to pass the FAA 107 test. Next year, he is personally presenting at four Waterkeeper Regional Conferences so that, all across the country, Waterkeepers can benefit from his experience and expand the scope of the work they do with this new tool, which promises to be as important as the boat, canoe, raft, or kayak.

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER NETWORK STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-22

Last September, the Board and Staff of Potomac Riverkeeper Network met for a day and a half to create the 2020-2022 Strategic Plan. Following a vigorous exchange of ideas and some outside the box thinking, we're happy to report that a new strategic plan resulted, and we'd like to present some highlights.

This strategic plan supports and builds on the core program of PRKN, which includes (1) assessment of the health of our rivers and the identification of pollution sources that threaten it; (2) advocacy to eliminate pollution sources and secure policy changes to stop pollution; and (3) enforcement of federal, state, and local laws to prevent or reduce pollution. These are PRKN's core competencies and strengths as an organization. No other organization in the watershed is better at developing strategies to stop pollution using the full range of legal, grassroots and policy tools.

The Plan recognizes that federal and state enforcement of environmental laws is not sufficient to protect the public's right to clean water, especially for those in underserved communities. So we will expand our outreach and service to those communities. In addition, PRKN will continue to ensure better coverage of the range of pollution problems plaguing our watersheds with the use of water quality monitoring, compliance sweeps, and strong partnerships with those who can help PRKN to identify and stop pollution.

The Strategic Plan identifies goals and actions, both watershed-wide and for each Riverkeeper.

Our goal watershed-wide is to maintain our strong assessment, advocacy and enforcement program and expand its reach, where feasible, through partnerships and technology tools. The actions to reach the goal are to continue to look for opportunities to strengthen the core work of assessment, advocacy and enforcement. We intend to expand our capability to detect and respond quickly and effectively to pollution events, and we will rely on partnerships with universities, elected officials, environmental and public health agencies, fishing and rafting guides, nonprofit national and local organizations, pro bono legal partners, and community leaders to find new opportunities for impact.

For the Potomac Riverkeeper, our goal is to increase public knowledge of bacterial contamination in the Potomac and to support infrastructure investments to reduce those sources. The main actions are to continue with the Swimmable Potomac Campaign for the DC area to drive public knowledge and support for reductions in bacterial pollution and seek to expand our existing water

quality monitoring campaign with more sites and more volunteers. In addition, we will enhance collaboration with local organizations, including communities that live on the water (such as the Wharf, National Harbor, and Colonial Beach) and establish a long-term partnership with at least one underserved or diverse community in the urbanized part of the Potomac. Finally, PRKN will reduce sewer overflows into the Potomac River by monitoring and strengthening the District of Columbia Clean Rivers Project.

The Shenandoah Riverkeeper's goal is to achieve measurable reductions in the size and extent of algal outbreaks in the Shenandoah and its tributaries through direct action by state regulators to reduce nutrient pollution of the river. His actions? Launch a broad Respect the Shenandoah public campaign on algal outbreaks,

educate policymakers on the problem and its causes and solutions, and obtain policy changes as well as continued cost-share funding to reduce agriculture pollution. PRKN will also shift its patrolling efforts for herds of cattle in the river from the Shenandoah River to the North, South, and Middle Rivers and Cedar Creek.

Upper Potomac Riverkeeper also has important goals in water quality improvements. We will implement the Keep the Cacapon Clean Campaign to drive water quality improvements to ensure safe recre-

ation and increased public access to this American Heritage River. In addition, we will determine the extent of PFAS contamination in the Upper Potomac and take actions to have safe levels of PFAS in the river.

To reach those goals, we will launch the Keep Cacapon Clean Campaign with the assistance of local partners and the Cacapon Institute to expand primary contact recreation access and safety in the Cacapon by reducing sewage pollution. We will address PFAS legacy toxic contamination by identifying its sources through expanded water quality monitoring and take action to reduce the associated public health and/or ecological risks. A continuing feature of our efforts in the Upper Potomac will be to establish regulatory protections for the river and connected groundwater sources from contamination in karst areas where they are particularly vulnerable.

We will be measuring progress against this strategic plan over the next three years – and will be looking for partners to help us achieve these goals. If you would like to discuss the goals and the paths toward their achievement, please contact Nancy Stoner, PRKN President.



Board and staff hard at work during strategic planning session



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LAW & WATER

A GALA EVENT TO BENEFIT

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

WE'RE GONNA PARTY LIKE IT'S 2020!

PRKN'S LAW & WATER GALA IS GOING VIRTUAL

While we are not quite ready to throw in the towel on an in-person event on October 25th, we do anticipate continued social distancing efforts through the fall and want to ensure that all in our community have the opportunity to celebrate together while remaining apart.

This year, you may look forward to a creative lineup of entertainment including action videos from the "Potomac Spy" drone fleet, remarks by special guests, a bigger, better offering of Live and Silent Auction items with online bidding, a chance to raise your paddle to support your Riverkeepers, and of course it wouldn't be a PRKN Live or Virtual Gala without music and dancing to the Thrillbillies!

This is an event that you won't want to miss, and now you don't have to!
Stay tuned for more details on how to "Turn Up" or "Tune In" to support Clean Water!