



Friends of Mason Neck State Park

April 2022 Newsletter

The Eagle Festival Will Be Live This Year!
10 AM to 6 PM, Saturday May 7, 2022



The Eagle Festival will be live and in-person this year! Please mark May 7 on your calendar for a wonderful day at Mason Neck State Park. The festival will open at 10 AM. We'll have live animal programs throughout the day, including a program with Buddy the Bald Eagle and programs featuring raptors. You can ride the hay wagon to an active bald eagle nest, where you'll be able to watch the activity at the nest using telescopes and binoculars. The Visitor Center will have an Eagle Cam on the large screen, along with an interpreter who can tell you about bald eagles.

The Children's Tent will have activities for children throughout the day including two puppet shows. Children will enjoy free pony rides. Exhibitors will have environmentally-themed presentations and activities for you to enjoy.



Costumed characters will travel around the festival site to entertain you and your children.



There's no need to bring a lunch; the Lions Club will offer food and drinks, and there may be other options for you as well. A live band will perform throughout the day.

For early risers, the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia will lead bird walks on the Bayview Trail at 8 am and 9 AM. You must register for the bird walks, and participation is limited to twelve people for each walk. You can register for the 8 AM bird walk [here](#) and for the 9 AM bird walk [here](#).

The festival is free and open to everyone. Come out and enjoy the day at Mason Neck State Park!

We need volunteers to help make the Eagle Festival run smoothly. We need people to help park cars, greet guests, help our costumed characters, and more. You can see the volunteer signup sheet and register as a volunteer [here](#).

Nature Photography Class

9 AM, April 30



Would you like to improve your nature photography skills? Friends Board member Randy Streufert will teach the class. His photos are on display in the Visitor Center and have appeared on the cover of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine. His photograph was the grand prize winner of the 2019 National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife contest.

The class will include time indoors to cover a few photography basics before going outside (weather permitting) to explore some of the park's best places to photograph nature. The class is intended to benefit anyone with an interest in learning nature photography and where in the park different species of wildlife are likely to be seen.

The class is free to members of the Friends of Mason Neck State Park. The fee for nonmembers is \$15. The class size is limited to 14 participants. You can register for the class [here](#).

Help Spruce Up the Park on Earth Day, April 23

Earth Day is a wonderful time for everyone to take time from their busy schedules and become a steward of nature. The Park is holding two events on April 23.



Gardeners will have an opportunity to beautify the Park by planting wildflower plugs. We'll meet at the kayak launch site at 9 AM for a presentation on wildflowers by the Fairfax Master Gardeners, and then get busy planting. This event is limited to 15 people, and you must register in advance. To register, please call the Visitor Center at 703-339-2385 or email masonneck@dcr.virginia.gov.



If gardening is not your "thing" you can join the park rangers and other volunteers to clean the trash that washes up on the shoreline. Please bring water and expect to get wet and a little dirty. Boots are highly recommended. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9 AM for a quick talk on conservation before we head out. There is no need to register for the shoreline cleanup.

Mason Neck State Park Manager Reinhardt Gray Retires; Receives Commendation from the State



Reinhardt Gray, Manager of Mason Neck State Park, has retired after a 10-year career with Virginia State Parks. Mr. Gray came to Mason Neck State Park as Park Manager in 2015.

He began his career with Virginia State Parks as a Park Ranger at Belle Isle State Park in 2011. He was promoted to Assistant Manager at Leesylvania State Park, where he established a strong relationship with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington, giving underserved children in the community the opportunity to participate in the Great American Campout. Mr. Gray continued that tradition at Mason Neck State Park.

As his career with State Parks progressed, Mr. Gray was promoted to Manager at High Bridge State Park, a 26-mile long rails-to-trails park. Much of his work was focused on working with the various communities surrounding the park.

As Manager at Mason Neck State Park, Mr. Gray was instrumental in forming a coalition of the leaders of the 6,000+ acres of public lands found on Mason Neck. Working together with a united mission, the coalition became a support structure for sharing resources and ideas, leading to better experiences for the many thousands of people who visit Mason Neck each year.

Mr. Gray also built an exceptional partnership with the Friends of Mason Neck State Park, Inc. Working with the Friends, he was able to get much-needed State funding for additional park staff as well as access to Fairfax County public water. Partnering with the Friends and local garden clubs, he opened the Junior Rangers program to children of low-income families who otherwise would not have access to these activities. Similarly, he worked with the Lorton Community Action Center to welcome underserved families to the park at no charge for picnics and activities.

Reinhardt Gray grew up in Newport News, Virginia and received a degree in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Pfeiffer College. Prior to joining Virginia State Parks, he served as a Virginia State Trooper, an agent at the Bureau of Criminal Investigations, a U.S. Postal Inspector, and a Supervisor of Federal Air Marshalls. Reinhardt has provided law enforcement training for State Parks and has worked with groups around the country and the world to help them with issues involving evidence control.

With four children, two grandchildren and being recently married, Reinhardt looks forward to spending time with his family. An avid runner, he plans to continue his regular workouts and participation in races. From an early age, he was taught that he had to be the best he could be every day, no matter what.

In recognition of Reinhardt's service to Virginia State Parks, the Virginia House of Delegates Passed House Resolution 218 commending him on his retirement. You can read the House Resolution [here](#).

Interviews are underway to select a new Park Manager, with the expectation that the position will be filled this month.

Elizabeth Hartwell – Champion of Nature at Mason Neck



Photo courtesy of Rob Hartwell

Sixty years ago, developers had ambitious plans to create a satellite city on Mason Neck. Thanks to the efforts of Elizabeth Hartwell and others like her, Mason Neck is instead home to a state park, a regional park, a national wildlife refuge, a Federal Special Recreation Management Area and other natural spaces. Last month, WTOP published an article on Elizabeth Hartwell and her efforts to preserve nesting areas for Bald Eagles on Mason Neck. You can read the inspiring story [here](#).

April Programs at Mason Neck State Park



Mason Neck State Park will host 18 programs and events this month, led by the Park's excellent, trained interpreters. You can find their calendar of events on the Park's [website](#). Just scroll down until you see the list of upcoming events and click on "More events at this park."

**Please Help Us Support
Mason Neck State Park!**



If you are already a member of the Friends of Mason Neck State Park, **Thank You!** Your membership dues and donations help us to support the Park's activities and enable us to fund special events such as the Eagle Festival each May, our Owl Moon evening each fall, and the annual Swanfall Holiday Program each December.

If you aren't a member, or your membership has lapsed, you can become a member at [Join the Friends of Mason Neck State Park](#). You can also donate to the Friends [here](#).