



February 2024 Newsletter

Join Us Online for the Friends of Mason Neck State Park Annual Meeting February 24 at 2 PM



The Friends of Mason Neck State Park will hold their annual meeting starting at 2 PM on Saturday, February 24. The meeting is open to everyone. This will be a virtual meeting on Zoom. Our program will be "Making Mason Neck State Park Accessible for All." The Park's Chief Ranger Law Enforcement Taylore Willis and the

Friends' Accessibility Advisor will highlight what the park and the Friends, working together, have achieved so far in making the park more accessible and the plans for future improvements.

The presentation will be preceded by a brief formal meeting at which members will vote on a slate of Directors. President Hillary Clawson will discuss the Friends' key achievements in 2023 and plans for 2024. We'll send out a link to the program a few days beforehand.

All the Board's current directors are standing for re-election. You can review their brief biographies [here](#).

If you are a member of the Friends, it is very important to cast a vote for the slate of directors even if you cannot attend the meeting. Our bylaws require that a significant percentage of the membership must vote in person or by proxy for an election to be valid. If you are a member of the Friends and you cannot be present for the meeting and election, please email your proxy vote to FriendsofMasonNeckStatePark@gmail.com by noon on February 23, and place "Proxy Vote" in the subject line. You should state whether you vote for or against the slate of nominees. If you and a spouse or partner are both members, please be sure that both of you cast votes.

The Friends Purchased EnChroma Glasses for Use by Park Visitors with Color Vision Deficiency



Color blindness deficiency affects an estimated 8% of men and .5% of women. The Friends have purchased several pairs of EnChroma glasses which are intended to help correct color vision deficiency. The glasses should enhance color vision for most people with red-green color blindness, enabling park visitors to have a better experience at the park. EnChroma regular glasses, for use with corrective lenses, and for children will be available soon for use at no charge at the Visitor Center.

Chick O'Dee Answers Your Mason Neck State Park Questions



Seven-year-old Gerald asked: "I know there are beavers in the park and one of the Rangers told me River Otters are there too. Are there other mammals that live near the water?"

Chick O'Dee's reply: Yes Gerald, muskrats also live in the park and are fairly common. They are active year-round, and since they feed at all times of the day, your odds of seeing one are good.



Muskrat feeding on marsh vegetation

Adult muskrats average between 16” and 25” long including a long thin hairless black tail that’s between 8” to -11” long. They are much smaller than beavers, which can weigh up to 70 lbs. A muskrat’s average lifespan in the wild is short by our standards – just one to three years.

Muskrats have dense brown fur; a rounded body; webbed hind feet for swimming; smaller front feet for digging; small beady eyes and small ears.



If you see thick marsh vegetation moving, be prepared for a muskrat to stick its head above to look around and feed.

Muskrats are often mistaken for beavers since they share the same wetland habitat. Their tails are the easiest way to tell them apart.



Muskrat



Beaver

In spring, sometimes young muskrats will venture out of the water to snack on flowers – in the picture below a juvenile is feeding on Spring Beauties.



The best place to see muskrats in the park is from the boardwalk over the marsh on Bay View Trail.

Have a question for Chick? To send in your inquiry, use the “Contact Us” tab on the homepage of the Friends website. We’ll do our best to answer it in our next newsletter.

Photos and reply by Randy Streufert.

The Friends' Evaluation of the Park's Trails Is Now on the Park's Website



The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has placed the Friends' descriptions of the accessibility of four of Mason Neck State Park's trails on the state park website. The addition of the trail information to the park's website is part of DCR's commitment to improving accessibility at all of Virginia's state parks. Placing the Friends' trail information on the park website will make it more likely to be read by park visitors. You can read the trail descriptions on the Friends' website [here](#) and on the Park's website [here](#).

The Fairfax Master Naturalists Donated Equipment to the Park for Use in the Pollinator Gardens



Chief Ranger Visitor Services Jamie Leeuwrick and Ranger Alex Dullea receiving FMN's donations

The Fairfax Master Naturalists have donated a Gorilla garden cart, a Stihl battery-powered weed whacker and a battery-powered hedge clipper to Mason Neck State Park for use in the park's pollinator gardens. The Fairfax Master Naturalists adopted the park's pollinator gardens as a Chapter Project last year. Working with the Friends of Mason Neck State Park, they have spent dozens of hours since then helping to restore and maintain the gardens. The Fairfax Master Naturalists and the Friends will resume work on the pollinator gardens in the spring.

February Photo of the Month: Curious Raccoon



Photo by Randy Streufert

Upcoming Programs at Mason Neck State Park



The park has 20 events scheduled in February. You can take a bird walk with a guide from the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia or try a beginner's bird walk if you are new to birding. Or you can hike to see the Tundra Swans, attend programs on beavers and other wildlife, participate in a cleanup of the park's shoreline, and more. Learn about all the park's 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, including funding initiatives that improve the accessibility of the park.

If you aren't a member, or your membership has lapsed, you can join the Friends [here](#). You can also donate to the Friends [here](#).