



Friends of Mason Neck State Park

January 2022 Newsletter

Enjoy First Day Hikes at Mason Neck State Park



Start the New Year off right with an invigorating hike at Mason Neck State Park. The Park's rangers will lead hikes for adults and children throughout the day. You can join them for a 2-mile round-trip walk to see the Tundra Swans at 9:30, noon or 2:30.



The Tundra Swan hikes leave from the parking lot for the Woodmarsh Trail at the Elizabeth Hartwell Wildlife Refuge, about a quarter mile before you reach the Contact Station. There will be telescopes at the shelter overlooking the marsh so you can get a better look at these magnificent birds, which spend the winter here after their long migration from far northern Canada and Alaska. Parking is limited at the Woodmarsh Trail, so you'll need to register for the hikes by calling the park staff at 703-339-2380 or emailing them at masonneck@dcr.virginia.gov.



The Park's rangers will lead Bingo Hikes on the one-mile loop Bay View Trail at 11 and 1. The Bingo Hikes will give the children an opportunity to enjoy a nature-oriented scavenger hunt as they look for the things shown on a bingo card-like handout. The Bayview Trail travels along the shore of Belmont Bay, then crosses a marsh before returning through deep woods, and is one of the most popular trails in the Park. The Bingo Hikes start from the parking area by the playground.

If you'd prefer to hike on your own, there's plenty of room to enjoy nature at the Park. You can walk more than six miles of unpaved hiking trails and walk or bike three miles of paved multi-use trails.

The Friends will have free coffee and hot chocolate from 9 AM until noon at the Visitor Center.

Admission to the Park is free on January 1, and there is no charge for the guided hikes.

Join Us for the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's Annual Meeting, 2 PM February 12: Restoration of the American Shad in the Potomac River



The Friends of Mason Neck State Park will hold their Annual Meeting via Zoom at 2 PM on Saturday, February 12. We'll have a brief business meeting at which we summarize our activities for the year and elect a Board of Directors. Following the business meeting, we'll have a

presentation by Jim Cummins, a biologist and river ecologist who has played a key role in the efforts to restore the Potomac River's shad population.

The American shad was once one of the East Coast's most abundant and economically important fish.



Unfortunately, by the 1970s water pollution, over-harvesting, and the blocking of spawning habitat by dams led to their decline. In 1983 a harvest moratorium on American shad was put into effect on the Potomac River but over a decade later, even with a much cleaner river, the shad population was still showing no signs of recovery. In 1995, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) began an 8-year American shad restoration program, with the assistance of local watermen from Mason Neck and the involvement and support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services.

Jim Cummins' talk will cover the success of that effort, the current status, how the Potomac contributed to subsequent and ongoing shad restorations in many other rivers in the mid-Atlantic, the involvement of regional schools, and a special description of the historic importance of Mason Neck to the Potomac's remarkable shad fishery.

The Annual Meeting and Shad Program are free and open to everyone. You can register for the meeting and program [here](#). When you register you will receive an email with the Zoom login information.

Help Restore the Health of the Potomac and Chesapeake



You can help restore the health of the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay by participating in Mason Neck State Park's Grasses for the Masses program. Volunteers in the program grow wild celery, an important underwater grass, in their homes and then plant it at the park to help bolster aquatic grass populations. Underwater grasses are a vital part of the health of the

Potomac and the Chesapeake. They provide food for waterfowl, oxygenate the water, filter pollution, reduce erosion and provide safe spaces for newly-hatched fish.

To participate in the program, all you need to do is attend an orientation session at the park and pick up your supplies. There is a \$25 charge for each Grasses Kit. You'll grow your grasses at home, then plant them at the park on Planting Day, May 22. All supplies must be returned to the park on May 22.

Registration for the orientation programs is required, and there is a maximum of 10 persons for each orientation. Orientation times are as follows, at the Visitor Center:

January 15, 1 PM

January 22, 11 AM

January 30 1 PM

February 5, 11 AM

February 6, 11 AM

February 12, 1 PM

February 13, 1 PM

Please call the Park Visitor Center at 703-339-2380 or email at MasonNeck@dcr.Virginia.gov if you would like to register, have any questions or would like to participate but cannot attend any of the orientation sessions.

MLK Service Day at Mason Neck State Park



Calling all volunteers and groups: Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Day is January 17. Please call or email the park office if you would like to volunteer. We have many great volunteer opportunities such as trail maintenance, shoreline cleanups, scout projects, Visitor Center Assistant and more. We can tailor your volunteer experience specifically for you or your group.

Members and Friends Enjoyed Swanfall, the Friends' Annual Buffet and Presentation

Sixty-five people enjoyed the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's annual holiday celebration, Swanfall, on December 5. Attendees enjoyed a great buffet of cheeses, charcuterie, smoked salmon, vegetable cups, fruit cups and assorted desserts.



Greg Butcher, the Migratory Species Coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and Vice President of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, presented "Wintering Waterbirds of the Potomac River."



Everyone enjoyed the event, which we held for the first time at Gunston Hall's Ann Mason Room to give people sufficient room to spread out.

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 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](#).