



January 2024 Newsletter

Come to the Park for Guided First Day Hikes



Join Park Staff on a guided hike on January 1. The Park has a unique beauty in winter, and First Day Hikes are the perfect way to start the year! Each trail is unique, and our leaders will offer information about the park and its plants and animals along the way. The Visitor Center will be open for more hands-on activities, and to warm up if needed!

9:30 am: Kane's Creek to Eagle Spur trail. A 3.8 mile hike. Packed dirt trail with stairs and roots. Not wheelchair or stroller friendly.



11:30 am: Tundra Swan Hike at the Woodmarsh Trail at Elizabeth Hartwell Refuge. Approximately 2.5 miles loop. Not wheelchair friendly, Limited space available for this hike only. Recommended for ages 8 and up. Registration is required. Register at <https://mnspeventbrite.com>

12:00 pm: Dogue Trail hike and roll. Wheelchair accessible. Approximately 0.85 miles, packed gravel trail.

3:00 pm: Family-friendly hike on Bay View Trail. Approximately 1.25 miles, with stops and hands-on opportunities for adventure and exploration. Packed dirt surface trail with boardwalks and exposed roots.

The Friends will provide hot coffee and cocoa during the day.

Admission and parking are free on January 1.

Welcome New Staff at Mason Neck State Park

Good news for visitors to the park: With the addition of two new personnel, Mason Neck State Park is once again fully staffed. Please take a moment to welcome them if you run into them.

Alexis Brink



Alexis joined Mason Neck State Park in October 2023 as the Chief Ranger Law Enforcement / Operations. She was born and raised in the heart of the Allegheny Mountains in Northwestern Pennsylvania, growing up in the outdoors.

After graduating from high school, she joined the Army, serving as a construction mechanic for 9 years in Georgia, South Korea, Tennessee, and Virginia.

During her career transition she had the opportunity to complete an internship with Virginia State Parks at Pocohontas State Park while working towards a bachelor's degree in environmental science at American Military University.

Alexis enjoys gardening, mountain biking, and jeep camping, all of course with her two dogs Harley and Jersey.

Alexis will head to the Cardinal Criminal Justice Academy in January to start her law enforcement training. We'll see her back at the park on a full-time basis this summer.

Peter Carmines



Peter joined Mason Neck State Park in November 2023 as a full-time Park Ranger. Peter was born and raised in Newport News, VA, growing up right down the street from the James River. He attended Virginia Commonwealth University, receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Urban and Regional Studies.

Peter has a background working in Information Technology (IT); however, the office life did not suit him, leading him to a career with Virginia State Parks. Just prior to joining the team at Mason Neck State Park, he participated in Virginia State Park's Career Development Program at Natural Bridge State Park in Rockbridge County.

Peter is an avid tennis player, kayaker, and an aspiring sailor.

The Friends Finished their Evaluation of the Park's Accessible Trails



Friends' Board member Pam Cressey and Kris Gulden, the Board's Accessibility Advisor, have completed their detailed review of the four trails in Mason Neck State Park that Virginia has designated as accessible.

The Friends' website now contains detailed descriptions of the four trails, including information on accessibility and photos of trail conditions.



The review of the park's trails is part of the Friends' continuing work with Park staff to make Mason Neck State Park more accessible.



You can see the reviews of all four trails [here](#).

Photo of the Month: Male Bluebird in Winter



Photo by Randy Streufert

A Large Crowd Enjoyed Swanfall 2024



Eighty people attended the Friends' annual Swanfall holiday celebration at Gunston Hall's Ann Mason room last month.



Guests enjoyed bountiful platters of charcuterie, cheese, vegetables fruit and desserts and an opportunity to socialize with other attendees.



Following the "meet, greet, and eat" session, guests were treated to a program on bald eagles by the Friends' Randy Streufert, an award-winning nature photographer.



Be sure to attend next year's Swanfall, when we'll have more tasty food and an interesting nature-oriented program.

Upcoming Programs at Mason Neck State Park



The park has more than 20 events scheduled in January. You can hike to see the Tundra Swans, attend programs on frogs and toads, woodpeckers, eagles, beavers and other wildlife, or learn survival skills, including building a campfire. You can 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](#).