



## **Friends of Mason Neck State Park October 2021 Newsletter**

**Experience Mason Neck State Park at Night!  
Come to "Park After Dark"  
6:30 – 8:30 PM, October 16, 2021**



Please join the Park Staff and the Friends of Mason Neck State Park for a unique after-hours event. Children will enjoy an "Enchanted Forest" walk – an opportunity to meet the Park's wildlife inhabitants and learn about their lives in the Park. Teens and adults can take a "Lights Out in the Park" hike – an opportunity to experience the woods, perhaps hear owls calling and find how well our eyes and other senses adapt to the darkness. There will be hot cocoa, coffee, s'mores and perhaps even a storyteller as people gather around the campfire.

There's no charge and no registration for this event. Just show up and have a good time.





# Did You Know the Park Staff Supports Our Warriors?

By Randy Streufert



September 2, 2021 – Wounded Warriors at the overlook next to the Visitor Center.  
MNSP Park Manager Reinhardt Gray is on the far left.

A very special group recently bicycled through Mason Neck State Park – over 30 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines recovering from injuries suffered while serving their country. Affiliated with the Fort Belvoir Community Hospital, the service members were participating in Soldier Ride®, a program sponsored by the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP).

WWP's website describes Soldier Ride® as: *a single or multi-day riding event that helps warriors build their confidence and strength through shared physical activities and bonds of service in a supportive environment. The program incorporates skill-building practices that accommodate all ability levels. Warriors never ride alone; they move forward together, as a unit, just as they did during their military service.*

The ride was on September 2, 2021, the day after Tropical Storm Ida passed through this area. The weather was perfect – sun shining, a bright blue sky, temperatures in the 70's and low humidity.

Most of the group rode standard bicycles but about eight Warriors had recumbent road bikes customized to accommodate their injuries. The group spread out, traveling only as fast as the slowest member, all the while remaining as a unit. An ambulance and a truck loaded with supplies trailed behind them.



Warriors gathered in formation at the Gunston Bible Church starting point.



The group started early in the morning at Gunston Bible Church and journeyed through Pohick Bay Golf Course, Pohick Bay Regional Park, and Gunston Hall keeping to the paved bicycle path whenever possible. Arriving at the park's entrance on Gunston Road, they traveled on High Point Road and headed to the Visitor Center for a rest break. There, two of the park's staff, Ericka Goines, the park's Chief Ranger (Visitor Experience), and Maribel Cervantes, the park's Office Manager, served them ice cream.

While the group was on High Point Road riding into and out of the park, Eric Percival, the Park's Chief Ranger (Law Enforcement), drove ahead in his state park truck, temporarily blocking and redirecting any oncoming vehicle traffic.



Wounded Warriors in MNSP on High Point Road – April 2014

After leaving the park they rode back to Gunston Bible Church, making the day's round trip over 15 miles. MNSP Park Manager Reinhardt Gray accompanied the group on his police bicycle complete with flashing blue lights. He served as the group's law enforcement escort for the entire trip, ensuring their safe passage while on or crossing public roads.

Although vehicle traffic was stopped while the Warriors were on High Point Road, other visitors and bicyclists in the park waved to or saluted the group as they rode past.

The waves, smiles and positive attitudes of the Warriors were infectious. Those spectators receiving a return salute from these heroes had their own special moment.



Wounded Warriors on High Point Road – April 2014



For over six years, the staff at Mason Neck State Park have worked with Wounded Warrior Project® representatives ensuring the bicycling Warriors get a safe and welcoming visit every time they come to the park.

The next time you visit Mason Neck State Park, please thank the staff for all they do.

## **Members and Friends Enjoyed Owl Moon With Secret Garden Birds and Bees**



More than 90 people attended the Friends of Mason Neck State Park's annual "Owl Moon" program. As the sun slipped behind the hills across the Potomac, Secret Garden Birds and Bees, shared up-close and personal views of an Eastern Screech Owl, a Barn Owl, a Barred Owl and a Great Horned Owl.







They followed the display of live owls with fascinating explanations of the owls' daily lives, including videos of owls and hawks competing for nests, photos of newly-hatched owlets, and audio recordings of the owls' calls.

If you missed this year's program, be sure to sign up for Owl Moon next October!

## **The Friends Supported the Park's Public Lands Day Shoreline Cleanup**



Twelve enthusiastic volunteers spent the morning of September 25 cleaning trash from the shoreline of Mason Neck State Park. We were particularly fortunate to have nine volunteers from Cox Communications on the cleanup crew. Thanks, Cox, for encouraging your employees to participate in public service!



The Friends organized the cleanup and provided snacks and water bottles for the volunteers.

The very high tide made cleanup from the shore a little more difficult than usual. However, the four volunteers who took canoes to clean up trash from illegal campsites on Sandy Point found lots of trash. (Camping is not permitted in Mason Neck State Park.) They returned with their canoes loaded with trash, including a 55-gallon plastic barrel, tires, and large numbers of bottles and cans.





## **The Park Hosted Lorton Community Action Center Family Day**

Mason Neck State Park sponsored Lorton Community Action Center Family Day on September 25. LCAC provides low-income individuals, senior citizens, and families residing in southeast Fairfax County with access to basic needs and the opportunity to empower themselves through its self-sufficiency programs. Family Day at Mason Neck State Park offered the participants a free lunch of burgers, hot dogs, sausage, corn on the cob, potato salad, brownies, cookies and more to the participants.



The participants also enjoyed games, kayak trips and an informative nature presentation. The Friends supported the event by supplying some of the food, staffing the barbecue grill and serving.





## Order a Friends of Mason Neck State Park Calendar

The Friends of Mason Neck State Park are offering three unique wall calendars for 2022 showcasing the wildlife of Mason Neck State Park. You can choose a calendar with photos of bald eagles; a calendar of singing songbirds; or a calendar of butterflies. All the photos were taken in or near Mason Neck State Park and feature animals that live in the park.



The calendar will feature the photographs of the Friends' own Randy Streufert. Randy has written and provided the photos for the "Critters of the Month" articles in the Friends' newsletters of the last several months. He recently won the Grand Prize in the National Wildlife Federation's "Garden for Wildlife" photo contest and Virginia Wildlife and other publications have featured his photos. You can order your calendars [here](#).



# 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 at the Jammes House each December. We've had to replace our in-person activities with virtual programs for the past few months, but we'll return to in-person events soon.

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](#).