



The Dragon's Tale

Volume XLI Issue 4 September 2023
P. O. Box 882
Gloucester, VA 23061



From the President *Jeff Wright*

This summer has been highly productive. We had an exceptional paddle season; held two successful stewardship events; we made great headway on trail work; sponsored a successful DREAM program for area teachers; honored FODR founders, and much more. [More](#)



General Meeting September 20 at 7 p.m. by Zoom *David Malmquist: Naturalist, Explorer, and Author*

Dr. David Malmquist uses his recently published book, the "*Chesapeake Bay Explorer's Guide: Natural History, Plants, and Wildlife*," as a springboard to explore some of the issues facing the Bay. [More](#)

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Founders Day *By Jeff Wright*

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Although FODR Adopt-a-Highway volunteers took the summer off, they had already made an impact from the winter and spring cleanups. Join us for the Adopt-A-Highway cleanup on September 30 at 9 a.m. in the parking lot of the Rappahannock Community College—Glenns Campus. [More](#)



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Citizen Science in the Dragon

*By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science
Committee Chair*

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This is the first in a series of articles about individuals and organizations who championed the protection and preservation of Dragon Run. As a scientist, Dr. Hoagman wanted to establish a foundation to help protect the Dragon and inform Middle Peninsula residents that they had a unique resource close to home.

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Maintaining the Beavers' Gated Community *By Art Gilbert*

Ever wonder how our local beavers came to live in gated communities? These pictures show FODR Paddlemaster Jack Kauffman installing dam gates to prepare for the summer paddle season and maintain the beaver's communities. [More](#)



STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Aquatic Insects in Dragon Run *By Kevin Howe, Treasurer*

The diversity and abundance of aquatic insects is a measure of the water quality of any freshwater aquatic system; the more species in greater abundance denotes the waters are the pristine. Dragon Run is pristine and, therefore, we have an abundance of aquatic insects. [More](#)



Hérons and the Dragon

By Lesley Newman

Since I've always been a sucker for happy endings, I figure if we can save a dragon, why stop there? Let's go save the world, FODR-style! [More](#)



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Friends of Dragon Run Hosts International Conservation Professionals on Dragon Run *By Carol Kauffman, Vice President*

FODR) hosted conservation professionals from seven countries on June 30. Ten participants of the William & Mary Institute for Integrative Conservation (IIC) "Conservation Catalyst" program attended the event along with three IIC members. [More](#)



Seeking Donations

Garage, living room, or SUV full of unused paddle gear? You have more kayaks than the Navy has ships? Let us know! Consider making a charitable donation to the Friends of Dragon Run. [More](#)

Coming Events

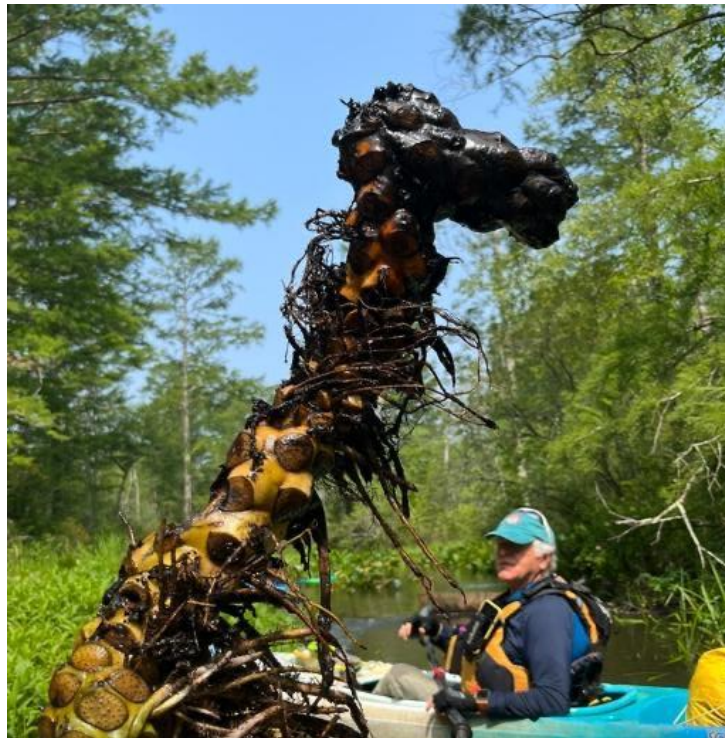
[More](#)



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From the President *Jeff Wright*



*Jeff Wright stares in stunned amazement when he sees a dragon! **

This summer has been highly productive. We had an exceptionally good paddle season filled with great guests and cooperative weather. We saw many smiles as the paddle route offered a lot to see and hear.

Two successful stewardship events made great headway on trail work, planning for the removal of invasives, and adding water crossings over some seasonal streams.

The Citizen Science (CitSci) Committee continued work at the Big Island Complex, and the Powcan and Morgan properties. The committee is well on their way to documenting more than one-thousand species in iNaturalist and eBird in the Dragon watershed.



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We launched our first [DREAM](#) program this summer. The program, which is for life sciences teachers from Gloucester, Mathews, Middlesex, Essex, and King and Queen counties, was a success. The teachers will share what they learned during the three-day event with their students. They will bring the students to Dragon Run this fall and spring for hiking, kayaking, and to learn about the Dragon Run ecosystem.

On August 13, [Founders Day](#), we celebrated the founding of the Friends of Dragon Run and honored nine of the founders, their spouses, and guests with a gathering of the Founders.



From left to right, Andrea Mittman, Jeff Wright, Kevin Howe, and Anne Ducey-Ortiz

FODR recently had a table at the Juneteenth celebration, and we look forward to participating in more community events this fall and next year.

Our [website](#) has become even more interactive with new features.

“Swamp Sightings” illustrate, with pictures and a brief explanation, the flora and fauna found in the Dragon each month. Our newest webpage, “Dragon in Action,” offers videos of FODR volunteers as well as interesting clips of some of the

flora and fauna in the Dragon. Go to [DragonRun.org](#) to see more.

Don't forget to visit [DragonRun.org](#) to find upcoming events and learn more—a lot more—about this unique habitat.



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* *For all you who doubt the existence of dragons:*

Of course, there are dragons in the Dragon. Why not? It is called Dragon Run isn't it. The Dragons appear in many forms.

One of the paddle crew's favorite forms is when a rhizome of the beautiful spatterdock plant breaks off at the bottom and floats in the current. Looks like a dragon doesn't it!

Our fearless guest, Cirse Gonzalez of the Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (CBNERR), snatched this beauty from the waters of the Dragon.

"Hey, put it back," I yelled, and she did but not before all of us took selfies with this native dragon. Yup, we have a flock or pack or gaggle of them to show visitors. Jeff Wright

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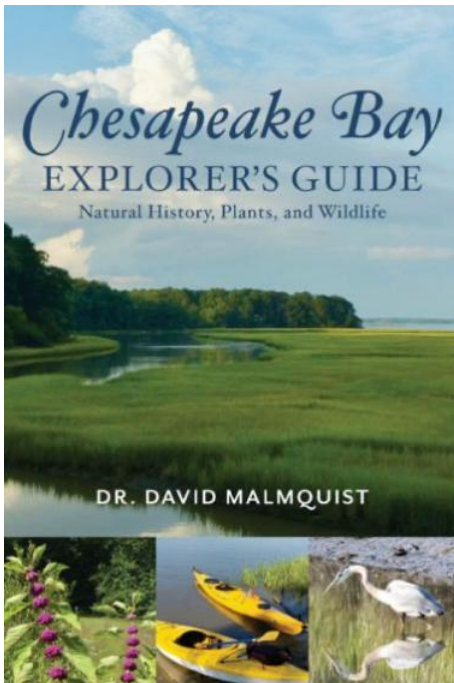


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General Meeting September 20 at 7 p.m. by Zoom

David Malmquist: Naturalist, Explorer, and Author

By Jeff Wright



Join us by [Zoom](#) on Wednesday, September 20, 2023 for the FODR General Meeting as Dr. David Malmquist uses his recently published book, the "*Chesapeake Bay Explorer's Guide: Natural History, Plants, and Wildlife*," as a springboard to explore some of the issues facing the Bay, and how watershed gems such as the Dragon Run can help preserve and protect Bay health. Malmquist's book provides readers with ecological notes about common Bay organisms and ecosystems, a brief history of the Bay region and its people, and reflections on the challenges and solutions that will shape the Bay's future.

Malmquist recently retired as Director of News & Media Services at William & Mary's Virginia Institute of Marine Science, where he spent 23 years telling the stories of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. An avid outdoor explorer, he has traveled extensively throughout the Bay region, documenting its flora and fauna



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and soaking up the Bay's rich heritage. Malmquist lives near the shoreline of Chesapeake Bay in Williamsburg with his spouse Deborah, sons Sam and Ben, and black lab Oliver. His favorite pastimes are biking, kayaking, and exploring the natural world. And yes, David, Debbie, and Sam have all paddled with the Friends of Dragon Run. Clearly a great choice by a great family.

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Zoom Information

Topic: Friends of Dragon Run General Membership Meeting
Time: Sep 20, 2023 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83862270508?pwd=OEZrZVRwb1ZMSVh2NXQrdVhyU210Zz09>

Meeting ID: 838 6227 0508

Passcode: 541901

One tap mobile

+13092053325,,83862270508#,,,,*541901# US

+13126266799,,83862270508#,,,,*541901# US (Chicago)

Dial by your location

- +1 309 205 3325 US
- +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
- +1 646 558 8656 US (New York)
- +1 646 931 3860 US
- +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)
- +1 305 224 1968 US
- +1 564 217 2000 US
- +1 669 444 9171 US
- +1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)
- +1 689 278 1000 US
- +1 719 359 4580 US
- +1 253 205 0468 US
- +1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)
- +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
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- +1 386 347 5053 US
- +1 507 473 4847 US

Meeting ID: 838 6227 0508

Passcode: 541901

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/u/kFeYRK0n8>

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Founders Day

By Jeff Wright



From left to right: Harvey Morgan, George Zahn, Jerry Stokes, David Muffleman, Davis Rhodes, Brent Heath, Robert Davis, Buddy Burnett, and William Harwood.

FODR received its Articles of Incorporation from the Commonwealth of Virginia on August 13, 1990. And, on August 13, 2023 we celebrated that day and the amazing individuals who made it happen.

We reached out to the original founders we could locate and were fortunate to have almost all of them attend. Nine founders, their spouses and guests, as well as current FODR Board members gathered on August 13 at Brent and Becky's Bulbs in Gloucester. Three of the guests were Jimmy Morgan's sons.

It was a great day to hear stories from the founders. We learned about the early years, Jimmy Morgan's incredible efforts to form the organization, and how the



Harvey Morgan, Davis Rhodes, and Brent Heath



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organization built the sound foundation that they unselfishly passed on to the generations that followed. The energy in the room, fueled by these stories, was evident and stayed with many of us long after the event ended.



In a ceremony at the beginning of the event each founder was presented a FODR hat with his name embroidered on the hat as well as the word founder. For the few who could not attend in person we are making arrangements to get them their caps.

The next event on the agenda was the “big event,” a panel of the founders discussing the origins of the organization, memorable moments, and their favorite recollections. A lot of glistening eyes were seen, particularly in the audience, as these champions of the Dragon talked and filled us with pride about the organization and the mission we are part of.



We then shared an amazing cake adorned with the FODR logo, a kayak, and “big trees.” During the last part of the event, current members of the FODR Board presented an overview of some of FODR’s ongoing work and future endeavors.

Our founders clearly did great things. Honoring them as a group was long overdue. Honoring them on Founders Day . . . we will do again and again . . .

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A Dream Come True

Teachers From Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex Counties Completed the First Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship (DREAM)

By Molly Broderson



Dream participants explore Dragon Run by kayak. Pictured left to right: Stephanie Sowers, Stephanie Bowen, Jennifer Patterson, Natalie Fleet, Natalie Smith, and Judy Green

While this may look like a fun day kayaking with friends, these educators represent three different counties - Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex - who participated in a three-day professional in-service program, DREAM (Dragon Run Environmental Academy Mentorship). DREAM was sponsored by the Friends of Dragon Run and made possible, in part, through a generous grant from Dominion Energy.

The teachers explored the Dragon Run watershed in kayaks, on foot (hiking trails), and conducted water quality experiments. Instructors for DREAM included Friends of Dragon Run volunteers.



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Instruction was based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) program. The teachers will share information about what they learned with their seventh-grade students during the 2023-2024 school year. The Friends of Dragon Run will continue to be a mentorship resource for the teachers for pursuing MWEE based programs.

We have already begun to plan next year's DREAM event and are researching the resources to support bringing more teachers and their students to this special place.



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DREAM

It was the night before DREAM
And all through the woods
The DREAM team got ready
displaying the goods.



Kayaks
and caps
were
lined up
with great
care,
knowing
the
teachers
would
soon be
ready out
there.





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The teachers were greeted and got into their boats
And enjoyed a quiet paddle with time to just float.



Using MWEES as our plan for all three days
All had time to reflect on upcoming school days.





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A scavenger hunt as we walked the many trails helped all to look for plants, lichen and snails.



Scientific experiments such as water investigations made the time on the Dragon seem like a summer vacation.



Thank you FODR for all your support!
And this is the end of this rhyming report.



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Pictured left to right: Terry Skinner, Jennifer Patterson, Jack Kauffman, Judy Green, Carol Kauffman, Natalie Fleet, Stephanie Bowen, Stephanie Sowers, Susan Walton-Fary, Natalie Smith, Sherry Rollins, Molly Broderson, and Bambi Thompson (Teachers are wearing red FODR hats.)

Feedback From the Education Community

Dr. Vlandu, Superintendent of Gloucester County Public Schools

"Thank you for sharing this outstanding experience. I absolutely love this approach to learning about and teaching science."

Dr. Tracy Steitz, Superintendent, Middlesex County Public Schools:

"That is great Molly! Thank you for sharing. I appreciate the opportunities for our teachers."

Dr. David Daniel, Superintendent, Mathews County Public Schools:

"Thank you for sending this my way. I'm hoping to do a brief recognition at this month's board meeting and then highlight this work on our website. It looks like an awesome experience."

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Shinrin-Yoku for You!

The FODR Farewell Summer Member/Guest Hike

By Steve Mathews, Hike Master

Shinrin is Japanese for forest. *Yoku* means bath. *Shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing, means to relax and unwind in the rustic beauty that nature provides. It means to become immersed in the forest through your senses and perceptions.

Could there be a better place to bathe in a late summer forest than the Dragon Run watershed? The pictures below are just some of the treasures you'll see.

FODR Members and their guests are invited to gather at the Big Island Complex on Sunday, September 17 at 10:00 AM for the Farewell Summer Member/Guest Hike.

Details and signup instructions will be posted on DragonRun.org in early September. Hope to see you there!



Downy Rattlesnake Plantain



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Broad Beech Fern



Bear's Foot



Maiden Hair Fern

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Holy hell! Who are all these people!

By Jeff Wright

These were Teta's first words as she turned into the parking lot at the Mascot bridge. She predicted that only a few people would show up for the dedication of the Friends of Dragon Run Teta Kain Nature Preserve. Boy, was she wrong.

Fifty-five participants turned out--friends, admirers, not to mention county and state officials, Founders of Dragon Run, FODR members and volunteers, and members from many of the organizations Teta has worked with over the years.



Teta below the new sign donated by Anne Ducey-Ortiz and Danny Ortiz

Teta was overwhelmed! When we asked her if we could name the preserve in her honor, she had one request: "I want bagpipes." So, of course, we had a piper at the gala event.

The new name for the FODR property at Mascot, recognizes Teta Kain's extraordinary volunteer service to Virginia and the Middle Peninsula. She has spent decades of work on species counts, protecting swamps and wetlands, capturing nature through photography, as a nature guide for hikes and kayak tours, as a speaker about the natural world, as the leader of nature-focused organizations in Virginia, and as the organizer of bird counts, butterfly counts, and moth nights.



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"A richly deserved honor for Teta that now appears on maps. A Big Thank you to Anne Ducey-Ortiz and Danny Ortiz for donating the beautiful sign unveiled at the event. Personally, I wanted to call it the Teta Kain National Park as she is much more than just a local treasure," said FODR President Jeff Wright.

For more about Teta, visit DragonRun.org and click "Tributes to Teta Kain."

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Summer Paddle Season Highlights

By Carol and Jack Kauffman, Paddlemasters

Optimal water levels, only one rain-out, 20 dedicated volunteers, and 86 exceptional guests made the 2023 summer paddle season a success. Plus, we held a paddle for Boy Scouts from Tappahannock.

Summer paddle revenue totaled \$5,000 plus \$2,307 gross income (approximately \$1,356) from merchandise, membership, and donations.

Reservations for the fall paddle season open September 1 at 9 a.m. Register early; seats fill up fast.



Sixteen volunteers and two canines turned out to power wash and scrub the kayaks and were treated to Carol Kauffman's outstanding vegan cooking.



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Get ready for our autumn paddle season, October 19-November 5. The foliage will be magnificent and along the bank you will see shrubs laden with bright red berries, ready for migrating birds to stop and load up on their journey south.

Reservations open on DragonRun.org on September 1 at 9 a.m. Register early; seats fill up fast.

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Stewardship Projects

By Jack Kauffman, Paddlemaster



Twenty-seven volunteers turned out for the June 11 stewardship event. In this picture they are waiting for their assignments.

Stewardship events resumed June 11 and FODR volunteers had already placed bollards at the Teta Kain Nature Preserve, completed installation of water crossings on the Williams property, and put down gravel on the road leading to Big Island. The next stewardship event will be held on September 19. Look for more details on the DragonRun.org web site.

Volunteers accomplished three major goals at the June 11 event.

- 1) Volunteers** tested three methods and planned and mapped for invasive removals. A section of invasive plants was pulled up by hand. In another area, plans were made to remove the plants by cutting them close the ground and applying an herbicide (approved for areas in or near wetlands) where the cuts were made.



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2) **Tree surveys** were performed by volunteers on part of the Revere property that was thinned in 2018 and on part of the Bulman property that was clear-cut in 2019. In both areas, 12 ft-radius circles placed at random locations were used to inventory the number and type of trees growing within the circles.

Succession is proceeding on both tracts led by the emergence of loblolly pines, tulip poplars, sweet gum, red maples, wax myrtles, and beech. Unfortunately, invasives were also found on the tracts and included tree of heaven, autumn olive, and Chinese lespedeza. Plans are underway to start the multi-year process to remove and manage these and other invasives.

3) **Volunteers placed logs on the fire trail** at the Bulman property to slow water, reduce erosion, and encourage plant regrowth. Since the clear cutting in 2019, charred logs have been placed to slow erosion. A wildflower seed mix specifically for this type of habitat was spread and covered with straw. Many of the species germinated and are doing well.



A volunteer on the Bulman property wades through thick brush to count trees in the survey area.



Kevin Howe levels a bollard at the Teta Kain Nature Preserve while other team members watch.



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In addition to FODR members, Virginia Master Naturalists from the Middle Peninsula, Historic Rivers, and Northern Neck Chapters were invited to volunteer and assist with these projects.

The next stewardship event will take place September 19. For more information and to sign up, visit DragonRun.org during the week prior to the event or contact Jack Kauffman at admdragonrun@gmail.com.

Results of the Revere and Bulman Tree Surveys

The tree surveys revealed an excellent and expected species composition coming into these two different-aged timbered lands. We found mostly native trees and some unwanted non-native invasive vegetation. The non-natives were found in the older Revere stand and included Chinese lespedeza, tree of heaven, and autumn olive. These three species are extremely invasive and the FODR Stewardship Committee is evaluating the steps necessary to eradicate them. No exotic trees were found in the more recently timbered Bulman stand (wonderful), but we will continually monitor the Bulman tract for exotics.

The Revere tract is dominated by loblolly pine which was expected as this land was previously managed for timber. But the stand has a substantial and varied native tree composition. Good native pioneer species such as sweetgum and tulip poplar are growing in strong numbers as well as other later successional species such as red maple, American holly, and devil's walking stick. And of great joy, the surveys found the growth of late succession hardwood species including American beech, northern red oak, and mountain laurel. This growth suggests that the potential for a future *old growth* forest of beeches and oaks exists depending on soil moisture.

The Bulman tract revealed, as expected, a substantial number of loblolly pines. But we also found numbers of early successional sweetgum and especially high numbers of our wonderful native tulip poplar. While the number of other native species (but no exotics) were low, we did find American holly, two species of



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hickories, three or four species of oaks, and a few sycamore, dogwood, and black cherry trees. This suggests that the seed bank in the Bulman soil is a good mix of native species which we see in the surrounding uncut forest.

Our surveys will continue as will our management for native species. Future reports will follow.

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Trash Collection:

By Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler

Although FODR Adopt-a-Highway volunteers took the summer off, they had already made an impact from the winter and spring cleanups. Four times each year volunteers collect trash around the three bridges that cross Dragon Run--Rt. 17 bridges, the Mascot bridge, and the Rt. 602 and 604 bridges. During the first two collection events in 2023, volunteers captured more than 9000 recyclable and trash items totaling 404 lbs from routes 17, 603, 602 and 604 bridge approaches.

We entered the data for the items collected into the Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell data base. The FODR entries support this global citizen science project that tracks the types and amounts of trash removed. A lot of plastics were picked up and kept from getting into the Dragon. The recyclables weighed 179 lbs and the trash weighed 225 lbs.

The next cleanup on September 30 may break records for volume and weight since we will be collecting a summer's worth of discards. Plus, we will show our volunteers how to use the Clean Swell app, available for mobile phones.

Join us for the Adopt-A-Highway cleanup on September 30. We will meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot of the Rappahannock Community College—Glenns Campus. Volunteers will be provided with safety vests, pick-up sticks, and heavy fluorescent orange trash bags.

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Citizen Science in the Dragon

By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair

The Citizen Science (CitSi) Committee continues to explore Dragon Run documenting the species that they find. This is an ongoing, years-long initiative. CitSci committee members, FODR members, and the public enter data from their observations into two phone apps, eBird and iNaturalist; eBird observations are rarely included with the iNaturalist data.

Recently, CitSci held two bioblitzes:

June 24 at Powcan—nine participants documented 115 species in iNaturalist and 39 avian species in eBird.

July 22 at the Morgan property—seven participants documented 150 species in iNaturalist and 55 avian species in eBird.



Participants from the Powcan bioblitz. From left to right, Maeve Coker, Robin Mathews, Meo Curtis, Kevin Howe, Betsy Washington, Sherry Rollins and Jeff Dechamps



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Total species found on FODR properties are:

Dragon Run Watershed	683
Big Island	68
Bulman	789
The Teta Kain Nature Preserve (Mascot)	39
Morgan	150
Powcan	115
Revere	178
Ware's Bridge	86
Williams	114

Additionally, the committee has documented 129 avian species which, for the most part, are not included in the iNaturalist data.

Committee participants have also found 20 *new* species. New species are defined as species that are previously undocumented within specified counties, per the *Flora of Virginia*.



White milkweed (Asclepias variegata)
found in Dragon Run watershed



Sourwood (Oxydendrum arboreum)
found during Powcan bioblitz

In May, the CitSci Chair, with special permission, visited a private property in Middlesex County. She documented 86 plant species, a handful of which are new county species records. A habitat on the property was identified as a new plant community occurrence, a basic mesic forest, previously unknown to occur north of Gloucester County.



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Pinesap (Hypopity monotropa) found at Big Island in Middelsex County

The Dragon Run watershed project is not only a FODR CitSci committee effort, but also a public effort. Anyone who enters iNaturalist data that falls within the Dragon watershed boundaries can be included in the project. Entries from others ensures that the data will not be biased with entries only from areas adjacent to the Dragon Run channel and swamp. As a result, upland sites that eventually feed into the Dragon as well as major tributary swamps such as the Timber Branch and Exol swamps will be included in the data. CitSci plans to work with landowners throughout the watershed to increase our knowledge of the entire watershed and not just FODR properties.

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Bacon's Rebellion—Re-telling an Old Story in a New Way

By Jeff Wright

Research and analysis work continued to determine what might have occurred in Dragon Run during Bacon's Rebellion centuries ago. Our teammates from St. Mary's College recently led a workshop that covered the results of their reviews of old diaries, land records, and accounts in the Middle Peninsula and Eastern Virginia in the mid to late 1600s. These documents have yielded clues about probable routes, locations, and disposition of both Bacon's forces and those of the Indian tribes. The overall goal of the recent work was to narrow down probable areas along the Dragon where the Pamunkey and Rappahannock tribes took refuge and where Bacon's forces were positioned as they tried to locate the Indians.

Based on the workshop, we plan to conduct further activities and research in the Dragon during September. The part of Bacon's rebellion that occurred in the Dragon is recorded as having taken place in September.

Our conceptual plans for September include bio-blitzes, hikes, and paddles with our partners the Pamunkey tribe, the Rappahannock tribe, Dr. James Rice, and St. Mary's College researchers Dr. King and Dr. Postemski. We will use a bio-blitz to determine what flora and fauna were available to support an estimated 500 Native Americans in the swamp for possibly a month as they fled, hid, and foraged. Additionally, we will conduct soundscapes and view-scapes both during the day and at night to analyze how the swamp provided excellent concealment that further protected the tribes.

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Champions of the Dragon:

Walter Hoagman and the Dragon Foundation

By Jeff Wright, President

This is the first in a series of articles about individuals and organizations who championed the protection and preservation of Dragon Run. Some of the individuals and organizations we will cover pre-date the founding of Friends of Dragon Run. The series also will cover the amazing collection of individuals who founded FODR or played a major role in its growth and the work to preserve, protect, and encourage wise use of the Dragon Run. They are all champions!

Walter J. Hoagman and The Dragon Foundation

A decade before Friends of Dragon Run received its charter in 1990, an organization was chartered to help protect Dragon Run in 1980. An announcement stated that the Dragon Run Foundation, also known as DRF, "is a non-profit educational organization. A state charter was granted to DRF to pursue its purposes of research, education and public service on Dragon Run, the swamp, and the watershed. Membership is free and open to any individual, family, or business upon application."

Dr. Walter J. Hoagman, who worked for nearly a decade at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) and then in businesses related to the natural world, launched DRF and was the organization's director. As a scientist, he wanted to do something for humanity which was to establish a foundation to help protect the Dragon. Just as important was his drive to inform Middle Peninsula residents that they had a unique resource close to home. DRF communicated with the Middle Peninsula community through pamphlets, newsletters, and events such as the Dragon Run Festival.

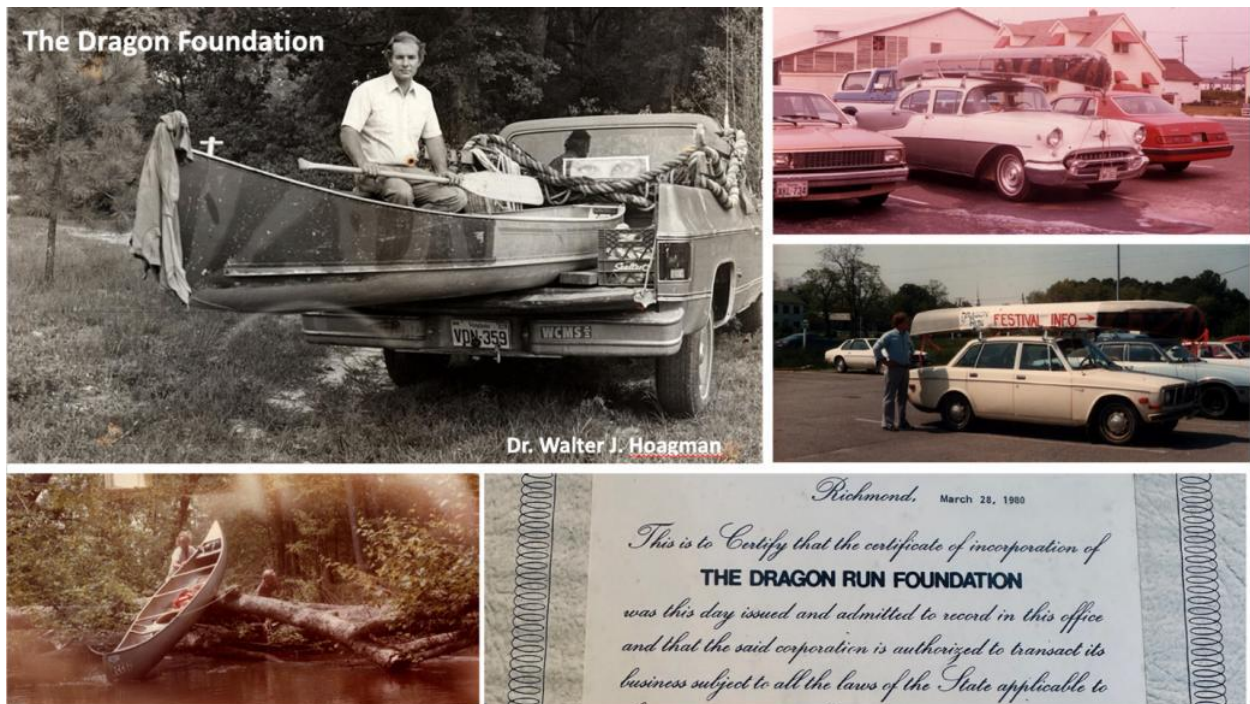


Walter Hoagman



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The Dragon Festival in 1980, for example, brought thousands of folks to the Rappahannock Community College in Glens. According to the DRF's summer 1980 Dragon Run newsletter, "DRF distributed approximately 500-800 folders, sold 92 copies of the *Dragon Run Reprints*, and signed up 61 new members." *The Dragon Run Reprints* was a collection of articles about the Dragon that originally appeared in other publications, mostly in the Commonwealth.



The lead article in the collection was titled, "The Dragon Canoe Cruising Trail." It had originally been published in the June 1959 issue of *Virginia Wildlife* by James V. Morgan, Gloucester, VA. The name rings a bell as the author is known to most of us as Jimmy Morgan who went on to form the Friends of Dragon Run later in the 1980s and gain a charter for the organization in 1990.

Walter recounted speaking to Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, and school groups about the Dragon. Donation jars were placed at various places in the community to raise money to support the DRF. The DRF did get opposition from a few in the community who were worried, "that you are going to open up the Dragon to, you



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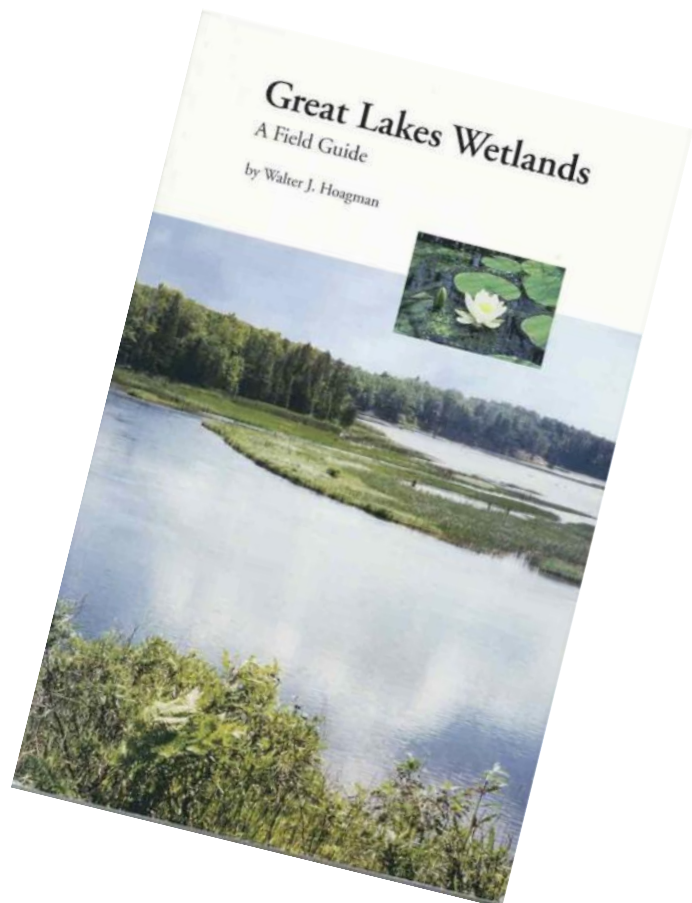
know, too much use, so therefore leave it alone." Smiling, Walter recalled that "what protected the Dragon in the days I was there, it was just so hard to canoe." A lot of downed trees," he remembered. Jeff Wright confirmed that many of the trees are still there to this day.

DRF membership was never more than 160 and growth slowed in the mid 1980s as some of its leaders left the area. Walter moved back to his native Michigan to help his mother following the death of his father. He became part of the Michigan State Sea Grant Extension where he was a Sea Grant agent for Lake Huron. Following his retirement, he moved back to the Middle Peninsula. When he returned in 2000, Friends of Dragon Run was up and running strong.

This article was made possible by the generosity of Walter Hoagman sharing materials from the DRF and sitting down for a wide-ranging interview about the Dragon, the 1970s and 1980s, and his years with the DRF. Here are his responses to two of my questions.

My first question asked what was your favorite memory about DRF? "We were public spirited. And that is always a good feeling . . . here's a neglected environment . . . we wanted it to stay natural, so we felt we were on the right side of history," Walter explained.

My second question asked about the key impacts of the DRF. "Awareness," Walter answered. "I would say some kind of environmental awareness."





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A big thank you to Walter Hoagman, one of the champions of Dragon Run. I truly enjoyed talking to him and learning about the DRF, the early actions to protect the Dragon, the Dragon Festivals, and gaining a deeper appreciation for some of the individuals who recognized the importance of speaking out for the Dragon. I should also credit Walter for two key field guides he wrote in the 1990s while in Michigan: *Great Lakes Coastal Plants* and *Great Lakes Wetlands*.

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Maintaining the Beavers' Gated Community

By Art Gilbert

Ever wonder how our local beavers came to live in gated communities? These pictures show FODR Paddlemaster Jack Kauffman installing dam gates to prepare for the summer paddle season and maintain the beavers' gated communities.



Jack Kauffman pounds in 2 X 4s for a beaver dam.

First, he drives 2 x 4s into the dam, far enough apart for a kayak to pass through. Then he removes the interwoven sticks from between the stakes, installs a plywood gate, and reuses the sticks to seal the new construction and patch low spots in the dam.

Local beavers were seen nodding approvingly.



Jack Installing the gate and weaving sticks back into the dam.

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STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS

Aquatic Insects in Dragon Run

By Kevin Howe, Treasurer

The diversity and abundance of aquatic insects is a direct measure of the water quality of any freshwater aquatic system; the more species in greater abundance denotes the waters are more pristine, natural, and clean.

Dragon Run is pristine and, therefore, we have an abundance of aquatic insects. Many of our aquatic insects live on the bottom or swim beneath the water surface where we rarely see them. But there are several we do see and two that are common surface-dwelling insects visible on nearly every paddle trip. They are the water strider and the whirligig beetle.

Water striders have many common names: pond skaters, water skimmers, water scooters or, my favorite, Jesus bugs, so called because of their ability to walk on water.

About one-half inch long, these water striders have evolved to balance and walk on water. In fact, they are incapable of diving into the water like all other surface-dwelling aquatic insects. They actually float on the water's surface with their three pairs of legs spread out to balance using the surface tension of the water. All their



1A water strider

legs are used for floating, but their forelegs are short and adapted for grabbing prey while the long middle legs are for paddling across the surface and their longest rear legs are used for steering and braking.

All water striders are predaceous, feeding primarily on other surface invertebrates and any insects that happen to fall into the water. Using



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their piercing-sucking mouthparts, they inject dissolving enzymes and then suck up nutrition from the prey's demise.

The water strider's body is perfectly balanced over their legs which, along with their entire body, are covered with minute hairs; over 1,000 hairs per millimeter which not only allows them to balance on the surface tension of water, but the dense hairs repel water better than any manmade material; no water or rain will weight them down. Research shows these little guys can move one hundred body lengths a second (equal to almost four feet) – the equivalent of a 6-foot-tall person swimming about 9 miles in one second--another reason to call them a Jesus bug.



In our area, water striders can overwinter on the water and remain somewhat active. Of course, if the water freezes, they die but their eggs, laid on aquatic vegetation can survive until spring in which case the young hatch out as a minute adult and go through five stages to fully mature.

Perhaps one of the most unique facts about the water strider family (Gerridae) is that the group includes the only insect that actually lives in the marine ecosystem. There are about 40 species of marine water striders, most of which are coastal but at least five species live in the tropical/subtropical waters of the open ocean, far from shore. They are quite small (less than quarter of inch) but are extraordinary and not all that rare.

Whirligig Beetles are so named because of their bizarre swimming habit—they rapidly whirl around in circles with seemingly no particular direction in mind. As adults, they are surface dwellers and gregarious. You may see a few to a hundred, but





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they can also range from just one to thousands of individuals. They are dizzying to watch but mesmerizing.



The Whirligig larvae are fully aquatic, living on the bottom so they are rarely seen and look nothing like adults. Both larvae and adults are predators feeding on smaller animals, like mosquito larvae. The adults are less than one inch long, somewhat flattened and elliptical in shape, and always appear as a dark color, ranging from dark bronze to steely gray. What they lack in looks, they make up for in adaptations.

For an insect, they have been well studied considering their physical, social, and behavioral adaptations. Like all insects, their skeleton (elytra) is external and shell-like. This shell contains tiny pits, which aids in their fast-swimming speed (reducing drag) and is covered with a layer of wax which makes them really slick and nearly impossible to hold onto if captured. Their eyes are divided into an upper portion for sight above water and a lower portion for sight below water; basically, forming two independent eyes on each side of their head—a fabulous adaptation for a surface-dwelling aquatic predator.



Though you will rarely see one fly, they can and do fly if the need arises. While most of their time is spent on the surface, they will dive for a tasty treat and have built-in “scuba” gear with a “buoyancy vest” adaptation. They keep a bubble of air under their hard forewings which acts as a buoyancy vest and pops them to the surface after they dive underwater. This bubble of air can supply them with oxygen acting like a gill or a scuba tank.

Their group behaviors are also adaptive and fascinating. For example, research indicates that the hungrier individuals tend to move to the outside of the group where they are potentially subject to more predation but where there is less competition for food. Swimming within the group reduces the chance of predation,



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and swimming behind another individual reduces the drag thereby reducing energy expenditure.



Whirligig beetles zipping around on the surface of the water.

Research shows these group-swimming beetles use their antenna to detect water vibrations created by things around them. It functions as a type of echolocation and senses positions of nearby prey, predators, and their fellow beetles. Further, they give off an odor like sour apples, which is a deterrent to predators--a chemical defense adaptation.

The Whirligig females lay their eggs on submerged aquatic plants in spring through fall. Larvae hatch in a week or two and then form a pupa, breaking out into an adult in one or two weeks. The adults may overwinter in a sort of hibernation state buried in the mud or may remain active during the winter if the climate is mild.

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Keep an eye out for these two fascinating insects next time you are on the water.

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Herons and the Dragon

By Lesley Newman

The Dragon has changed to me since I first paddled it in fall 2021. I would be lying if I said it was love at first stroke on that trip. Perhaps it was that I had been paddling in the area's creeks and rivers many times without seeing another soul; perhaps the fact that I hadn't eaten enough breakfast or maybe that I'd had too much coffee; but I remember being cranky when I first glided onto the water.

Whereas on the open water, I was a competent paddler, in the mix of bumper boats, swamp rose, and poison ivy, I felt like a novice. Why hadn't I gone back with my friend from Middlesex to enjoy the Dragon on my own terms and without other people? Why had I paid fifty dollars to be thrown into this mixing bowl of strangers? During COVID no less!



The great blue heron, *Ardea herodias*, from both Latin and Greek, is a solitary creature. Her methodical marsh monitoring is a familiar site in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, though typically, she is found wading in more open waters than the Dragon's swampland supports.

Herons are no strangers in Dragon Run, though. I have caught sight of them on several of the trips I've taken since my first paddle. The heron is an appropriate animal alter ego for those of us nature lovers who romanticize the great outdoors as a place to "get away from it all," and to be transported away from other people. Herons surpass people with their gift of flight and unmistakable silhouettes when spotted on backroads but also in lakes and streams along Interstate 64.



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Each year, around February or March, great blue herons gather in colonial nesting sites known as heronries. Herons don't nest in bald cypress trees, but they require mature trees, particularly stands of tulip poplar and pines, a habitat that exists on protected land and easements in the Dragon Run watershed. The adult herons leave these sites in search of food and are surely supported by the Dragon's fish nurseries, frogs, and even snakes (herons are classic examples of ophiophagic birds). Their penchant for old growth forests and healthy wetlands harkens back to the old school naturalist whose heart springs when thinking of a heron's solitude on pristine landscapes.

But our world is changing and back in October 2021, offshore from Big Island, so was I. As I dipped my paddle through the water and began to hone my maneuvering skills, I calmed down, relaxed a little. The stresses of my day job as a census worker subsided.

With the taming of my paddle ego, I could notice the paddlers around me, see them for who they were and why they'd chosen to be on the Dragon that day. No longer were they bumper boat obstacles out to spoil my time alone in nature. They revealed kindred spirits, other people who had grown up with beautiful places when they were younger, other people who were interested in preserving this land for future generations, or in watching to see if the prothonotary warbler numbers would increase in community science databases.

Environmentalism means many things to different people. However, the global pandemic brought into sharp relief how much we all need protected and conserved public lands. How much we all need nature. It underscored the importance of early and often experiences in nature for children. Instead of wanting the Dragon for myself that day when the paddle trip was over, I felt happy to have met this like-minded community. I felt inspired by the FODR members, the Board, and the volunteers helping to save a dragon.



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I spent a year volunteering as a guide on the Dragon, and my initial irritation with the bumper boats never returned. Each week during spring, summer, and fall, I met a variety of nature lovers, some with cameras, others with checkbooks, others with names for all the birds calling out. There were also nature naifs, with little knowledge, lots of wonder, and occasionally overwhelmed with joy at experiencing something new. More importantly, I learned more about Friends of Dragon Run's vision, not to save this "last wild place," but to nurture it and keep it healthy for the next generation.

On my last trip down the Dragon, I was a guest along with my spouse. I smiled privately as Casey got used to the refined paddling techniques and marveled at Jack Kauffman's skills out front as our lead guide. When our group got a close-up show from a mating pair of prothonotary warblers, warm smiles spread all-around.



Lesley Newman

Do I lament not having my very own Dragon, with a private prothonotary warbler show? Maybe. But this fantasy is not for the time in which I live. This time the fantasy is that we find ways to work together on complex environmental challenges. While I have had narratives of magical thinking where I am the only heron in the world, I also believe in a new story unfolding. Since I've always been a sucker for happy endings, I figure if we can save a dragon, why stop there? Let's go save the world, FODR-style!

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Friends of Dragon Run Hosts International Conservation Professionals on Dragon Run

By Carol Kauffman, Vice President

Friends of Dragon Run (FODR) hosted conservation professionals from seven countries on June 30. Ten participants from William & Mary's Institute for Integrative Conservation (IIC) "Conservation Catalyst" program attended the event along with three IIC members.

The day on Dragon Run was the final event of the participants' three week stay in Virginia. The Catalyst cohort included representatives from Amboseli Ecosystem Trust in Kenya, Botswana Wild Bird Trust, Conservation International locations in Cambodia and



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Singapore, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency of South Africa, Living Desert Museum of California, USA, Mbhashe Municipality of South Africa, and the Mongolian Conservation Initiative.

The (IIC) Conservation Catalyst is an integrative conservation leadership program for early and mid-career conservation professionals. The program's goal is to build a global network of professionals practicing *integrative conservation*, innovative, collaborative, and inclusive conservation that seeks human and ecosystem wellbeing in tandem. In June, the IIC welcomed its first cohort of Conservation Catalyst Fellows, who participated in an immersive summer residency at W&M.

Friends of Dragon Run guides, captivated the group with the lore and natural history of Dragon Run. Many attendees experienced their first time on a watercraft during their Virginia stay, and all were amazed by the Dragon's natural beauty and unspoiled ecosystem. The FODR volunteers described some of the keystone species the guests would see on the trip and the guests saw first-hand obvious signs of beavers, woodpeckers, and some very old bald cypress trees. For participants who have few trees in their home countries, it was incredible to see such an old forest.

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Seeking Donations

Garage, living room, or SUV full of unused paddle gear?

You have more kayaks than the Navy has ships? Let us know!

Consider making a charitable donation to the Friends of Dragon Run. We will put to “wise use” these items or offer them for sale to support FODR educational initiatives.

FODR volunteers will be happy to pick up any paddle gear that you no longer use—kayaks, paddles, personal flotation devices, and anything else that’s just taking up space and collecting dust, or even acting as a flowerpot and fostering flora or fauna (yikes) on your premises.

For more information contact donationsdragonrun@gmail.com or presidentdragonrun@gmail.com.



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Coming Events

For more information, visit DragonRun.org.

September 2023

- 1 (Friday) Fall Paddle Season Reservations open at 9:00 a.m.
- 12 (Tuesday) Scouting & Preparation for Nature Hike – Trails at Big Island Complex (FODR Member Volunteers & Property Monitors)
- 17 (Sunday) Guided Nature Hike at Big Island Complex (FODR Members and Their Guests)
- 19 (Tuesday) Stewardship Volunteer Event
- 20 (Wednesday) General Meeting and Speaker
- 30 (Saturday) Trash Pick Up Day- Meet at RCC Glenns at 9 a.m.

October 2023

- 3 (Tuesday) Scouting Trip for Fall Paddle Season (FODR Paddle Crew Qualification)
- 10 to 12 (Tuesday to Thursday) Workdays for Fall Paddle Season (FODR Paddle Crew Qualification)
- 13 & 14 (Friday and Saturday) Paddle and Logistics Crew Training for the Fall Paddle Season
- 19 October to 5 Nov - Fall Paddle Season
- 16 to 18 – Paddle trips and Hikes for Youth Organizations



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November 2023

6 (Monday) Fall Paddle Season Cleanup

14 (Tuesday) Stewardship Volunteer Event

15 (Wednesday) Annual Meeting, Elections, & Speaker

18 (Saturday) Trash Pick Up Day RCC Glenns at 9 a.m.

28 (Tuesday) Scouting & Preparation for Nature Hike – Trails at Big Island Complex
(FODR Member Volunteers & Property Monitors)

December 2023

•3 (Sunday) Fall Hot Cider member & family guided nature hike - Site TBD

•5 (Tuesday) Dragon Keeper Paddle Trip (FODR Paddle Crew Qualification)

•10 (Sunday) Newsletter Published

•12 (Tuesday) Stewardship Volunteer Event

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