



The Dragon's Tale

Volume XLI Issue 2 June 2023

P. O. Box 882
Gloucester, VA 23061



From the President

Jeff Wright

April and May were amazing months for Friends of Dragon Run: Awards, successful spring paddle season; terrific work on CitSci; great preparations for Dream; new members; continued excellence.

[Read more](#)



Teta Kain Receives Lifetime Achievement Award;

FODR to Dedicate Teta Kain Nature Preserve June 22

By Jeff Wright

Teta Kain was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable. On June 22, Friends of Dragon Run (FODR) will also honor Teta by dedicating the Teta Kain Nature Preserve. [Read more](#)



Spring Paddle Season

Carol and Jack Kauffman, Paddlemasters

Thirty-four volunteers guided 36 trips on the Dragon making the spring paddle season a success! Paddle trips were cancelled only twice due to weather and many of those paddlers were re-scheduled for other trips. [Read more](#)

Reservations for the summer paddle season open June 15 at 9 a.m. Be forewarned: seats fill up fast!



Stewardship Projects

By Jack Kauffman

Stewardship projects were on hold during spring paddle season, but three volunteer events occurred June 7, 10, and 11 [Read more](#)



Trash Collection: A Hands-on Way to Protect the Dragon

By Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler

On April 8, ten FODR Adopt-A-Highway volunteers captured more than 3,000 recyclables and trash items from the Rt. 17 bridges, the Mascot bridge, and the Rt. 602 and 604 bridges. The recyclables weighed 104 pounds and the trash weighed 99 pounds. [Read more](#)



Citizen Science in the Dragon

By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair

Our Citizen Science Committee (CitSci Committee) has maintained the energy we began the year with by hosting a bioblitz, celebration of Global Big Day/World Migratory Bird Day, and other accomplishments. [Read more](#)



Member and Photography Paddle

By Carol Kauffman, Vice President

Nine FODR members (birders and photographers) were invited to participate in an unnarrated paddle on April 27. [Read more](#)



Youth Paddle Trips

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Students from Aylett Country Day School and Light of the World Academy, two local schools in Essex County, recently participated in field days at our Big Island Complex. [Read more](#)



Streamside Attractions: Box Turtles

By Kevin Howe, Treasurer

The Dragon Run watershed is the perfect habitat for one reptile everyone “loves” to see—the turtle. Of the 53 species found in the United States, Virginia can claim 18 species, and the Dragon is home to seven. [Read more](#)

York River and Small Coastal Basins Symposium

Returning for its first biennial appearance, the York River and Small Coastal Basins Symposium convened practitioners and residents throughout the York, Mobjack and Piankatank watersheds for a day of knowledge exchange and networking in late May. Check out the results. [Read more](#)

FODR Board of Directors

Activities Calendar



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From the President

Jeff Wright



*Waiting for
water?*

April and May were amazing months for Friends of Dragon Run. Among the highlights:

- Teta Kain received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the York River and Small Coastal River Roundtable which includes Dragon Run;
- We had a very successful spring paddle season, and a series of paddles for local schools;
- Some terrific work took place on our citizen science initiatives to include recording several new species for counties in the Dragon Run watershed;
- Great preparations for the launch of the Dragon Run Environmental Academy and Mentorship (DREAM) were made;



- New members joined; and
- We continued excellence in our stewardship for land and water in the Dragon Run watershed.

These accomplishments were made possible by enthusiastic volunteers and our supportive guests at FODR events.

As an organization we have ongoing projects that inform the public and contribute to environmental literacy: nature tours by kayak and hikes, paddles and hikes for schools, species counts of flora and fauna, "Swamp Sightings" on our webpage, a quarterly newsletter with informative articles about Dragon Run flora, fauna, and ecosystems; distinguished speakers at our general membership meetings, and increased opportunities for our members to have meaningful volunteer experiences as we all the navigate stewardship of the Dragon.

Once again, we to raise our paddles to salute the many volunteers through the decades who helped establish FODR as a leader in sharing knowledge about the environment and protecting Dragon Run.



Teta Kain Receives Lifetime Achievement Award; FODR to Dedicate Teta Kain Nature Preserve June 22

By Jeff Wright, President

Teta Kain was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable. The Roundtable is a forum for information sharing and collaboration among water quality and conservation-minded stakeholders within the York River, Mobjack Bay, and Piankatank River as well as Dragon Run, Mattaponi River, and Pamunkey River. The Roundtable presents the Lifetime Achievement Award at their biennial conference to individuals who have a lifetime



Empress of the Dragon--Teta Kain

of volunteer service focused on educating and protecting the quality of life within the watershed.

On June 22, Friends of Dragon Run (FODR) will also honor Teta by dedicating the Teta Kain Nature Preserve. The preserve is located on Farley Park Road (Route 603) at the New Dragon Bridge in Middlesex County.

Like the Lifetime Achievement award, the new name for this FODR property recognizes Teta Kain's extraordinary volunteer service to Virginia and the Middle Peninsula

through her 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.

She is a force of nature. Her enthusiasm and leadership have made key and measurable contributions to the natural world. She always has both a sense of purpose and a sense of humor. Legions of Virginians know more about nature and



have become nature enthusiasts based on her charismatic skill and magic. Teta has *gifted* environmental literacy to countless individuals and groups.

For 35 years Teta has been a key leader within Friends of Dragon Run, as a former president of the organization but most famously as the kayak paddle guide who led more than a thousand individuals on tours of the Dragon and the Dragon Run watershed. She is known to many far and wide as the Empress of the Dragon.

Teta is an extraordinary communicator and a life-long learner. Her energy, positive attitude, subject matter expertise, and communication skills have had a clear and measurable impact on motivating people to learn about and embrace the natural world and to volunteer. Her volunteer work defines what it means to be a selfless naturalist who betters the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Her own words describe her years in Virginia:

*"[I] met literally thousands of people, chased a million birds and butterflies . . .
[there] aren't enough hours to do all of the wonderful things to be had here."*

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Spring Paddle Season

By Carol and Jack Kauffman, Paddlemasters

The Spring paddle season was held every day from April 14 through May 23. Thirty-four volunteers gave their time to make the season successful. Thirty-six guided trips on the Dragon were made available to the public, with eight guests per trip. All trips were booked soon after the sign-up went live on March 1.

Reservations for the
summer paddle season
open June 15 at 9 a.m.

The paddle trips help FODR achieve three goals: 1) Education – our nature guides point out the flora and fauna of the Dragon and describe what makes the Dragon such an amazing place; 2) Advocacy – many paddlers join FODR as members and volunteers who then help us protect the Dragon; and 3) Fundraising – donations from paddle guests are a major source of FODR's revenue.



Pickerelweed.

We were fortunate this spring that the weather was mild, and the rain didn't cause too much difficulty. We had to cancel two trips because of bad weather but were able to reschedule some of the guests.

Some of the flora in bloom included: An abundance of feather foil, blue flag iris, Virginia sweet spire, spatterdock, fetterbush, rose azalea, and arrowwood viburnum.

Pickerelweed, silky dogwood, and American bur-reed started to flower the in last few days of the season. Fauna we observed included: eagles, turtles, fish, and snakes. One group of students saw a wood duck with three young ducks. A few members on one paddle even



saw an otter! We continue to observe many birds along the Dragon. Of special interest to everyone were the Prothonotary Warblers, who often gave guests a special showing.

Our summer paddle season runs from July 19 to July 30. This is a short paddle season (just 12 days) but, it's one of our favorite times to be on the Dragon. One highlight will be the pickerelweed, which will be in full bloom. Signup for the summer paddle season opens at 9:00 AM on June 15. Be forewarned, guest slots fill up fast!

A note from two of our spring guests:

The Dragon was inspiring and memorable but the Dragon volunteer team that spent the day with us were the best! We just can't stop talking about all of them and how nice, helpful, fun, and knowledgeable they were. They really made the experience, and we hope to see them all again on a future paddle. Thank you again for making this amazing experience possible.

Liz & Jim



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Stewardship Projects

By Jack Kauffman, Paddlemaster

Many stewardship volunteers and committee members were participating as crew members for the spring paddle season. For this reason, stewardship volunteer events were not scheduled in April and May.

On June 7 FODR volunteers installed bollards to prevent vehicles from driving on the trail and launch area at Mascot. They also installed two new posts at the parking area for the new *Friends of Dragon Run Teta Kain Nature Preserve* sign and trimmed the parking area.

On June 10 FODR volunteers will assist in installation of three water crossings on our Williams property. These water crossings were designed by Aiden Longest as part of his Eagle Scout Project. Aiden led other scouts in cutting the lumber provided by FODR. On the 10th he will coordinate construction and installation of the crossings. One of the three water crossings will be ADA compliant, allowing persons in wheelchairs to access the loop trail on the property.

A stewardship volunteer event is scheduled for June 11. Three important projects for the day are:

1) Test removal of invasive Japanese honeysuckle on our Revere tract.

Volunteers will pull some of the invasive plants attempting to get as much root as possible. The location of the plants will be marked so we can determine if there is regrowth. This data will be used for future removal of undesirable plants.



Volunteers installing bollards at the new Friends of Dragon Run Teta Kain Nature Preserve



2) Surveys will be 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 will be evaluated at various locations for the number and type of trees. This data will help us determine how to manage regrowth to maximize diversity.

3) Volunteers will place logs on the fire trail at the Bulman property to slow water and reduce erosion and encourage plant regrowth.

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

For more information and to sign up to help, visit DragonRun.org during the week prior to an event or contact Jack Kauffman at admdragonrun@gmail.com.

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Trash Collection: A Hands-on Way to Protect the Dragon

By Mark Alling, Trash Wrangler



Adopt-A-Highway volunteers for the April 8 collection event: Mike Grose, Susan Crockett, Mark Alling, Sherry Rollins, Edie Bradbury, Jim Ewan, and Mellissa McCue. Not pictured: Jack Kauffman, Maeve Coker, Jeff Wright.

On April 8, ten FODR Adopt-A-Highway volunteers captured more than 3,000 recyclables and trash items from the Rt. 17 bridges, the Mascot bridge, and the Rt. 602 and 604 bridges. The recyclables weighed 104 pounds and the trash weighed 99 pounds. Included in the recyclables were a tire on its rim with a hubcap, a heavy 6-foot-long steel bar, a heavy steel gear and plate.

The predominant trash was 547 cigarette butts, which are highly toxic to the mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians of the Dragon. Also plentiful were miscellaneous paper and metal items (431), miscellaneous plastic waste (362), and



food wrappers (330). On the recyclable side, there were 378 plastic bottles, beverage cans, and glass bottles.

Join us for the next Adopt-A-Highway cleanup on September 30. There will be lots of trash and recyclables from the summer for us to collect. Collecting trash is truly a hands-on way to help preserve and protect the Dragon.

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Citizen Science in the Dragon

By Maeve Coker, Citizen Science Committee Chair

First Bioblitz on Morgan Property

Our Citizen Science Committee (CitSci Committee) has maintained the energy we began the year with by hosting several more events. We welcomed seven participants at a bioblitz on the Morgan property in Gloucester County for the first time. We tallied 44 species of birds and more than 70 species of plants, fungi, and invertebrates.

One of our most exciting finds of the day was the discovery of sundial lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), an increasingly uncommon species of wildflower, and one not often seen on the Middle Peninsula. We also found a sapling green hawthorn (*Crataegus viridis*), which although unassuming that day, was significant because it was a first record of any hawthorn species for Gloucester County. We look forward to going back with members to see what other hidden gems grow there!



Sundial lupine (Lupinus Perennis)



Sapling green hawthorn
(*Crataegus viridis*)



Sandhill Crane (Antigone canadensis)

Celebration of Global Big Day/World Migratory Bird Day

We also hosted a birding and nature walk at our Big Island Complex in celebration of Global Big Day/World Migratory Bird Day. The five participants were graced with 43 species of birds during their walk, almost all of them breeders on our property. We tallied the new species observed, bringing our Big Island Complex eBird list to 117 species! In addition to our avian finds, many exciting plant discoveries were made. New large and healthy orchid populations of large twayblade (*Liparis lillifolia*) and showy orchid (*Galearis spectabilis*) were found, as well as several species of plants previously not documented to occur in King and Queen County.

Accomplishments

Across the Dragon Run Watershed, we have drastically increased the data rolled into our iNaturalist Projects. Well over 1,100 observations have been submitted and we have documented more than 500 species of plants, vertebrates, insects, and fungi. These observations came from a combination of historical and CitSci Committee data, current CitSci Committee data, and member data. Exciting finds for the Dragon Run Watershed include an unexpected pair of Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) foraging in the farm fields adjacent to the Wares Bridge



property, and the discovery of northern blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*). The blue flag iris is a native wetland species not previously documented in the entire Middle Peninsula, and it is very uncommon across the state.



The more time our committee spends surveying the Dragon Run watershed, the more we realize that the watershed hosts rare plant communities in soil conditions very uncommon for the coastal plain. We look forward to getting out and sharing with our members the exciting species waiting to be discovered.

There is plenty more work to be done surveying the Dragon Run watershed and FODR properties, so stayed tuned for upcoming opportunities!

We have two events scheduled for in June: June 11, a joint Stewardship Event, and another bioblitz on June 24. We hope to see you there!

For more information on CitSci Committee events, watch your email, check the Dragon Run facebook page, or contact CitizenScienceDragonRun@gmail.com.

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Member Birding and Photography Paddle

By Carol Kauffman, Vice President

A special members' birding and photography paddle trip was held on April 27. Participants told us it was an exceptional and fun outing! Nine FODR members (birders and photographers) were invited to participate in an unnarrated paddle.

The guests paddled in small groups, moving slowly and covering much less of the Dragon than during one of our usual paddle trips. They enjoyed the opportunity to observe, listen, and photograph the wonderful flora and fauna seen and heard in the spring. Guests were captivated by the Prothonotary Warblers that posed by their nesting boxes and in nearby shrubs.



*Above: Prothonotary Warblers
Below: Viburnum and featherfoil
All photos by Tom Crockett*



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Youth Paddle Trips

By Carol Kauffman, Vice President

Students from Aylett Country Day School and Light of the World Academy, two local schools in Essex County, recently participated in field days at our Big Island Complex. Middle school students enjoyed a variety of events that included a guided kayak paddle trip, a guided trail hike with flora and fauna identification, and an exploration of macro-invertebrates in the Dragon. It was a fun experience for the students, teachers, and volunteers!

This field trip tops all other field trips! – Michelle, Light of the World Academy

Quotes from our volunteers:

The students were excited and asked a lot of questions about the plants and animals that live in the watershed. By the end of the day, they were reminding each other of what they had learned and were “seeing” the forest differently because they knew more about how all living things work together. – Terry

I was impressed with how the teacher interacted with his students while on the paddle. He asked a lot of thought-provoking questions and really got the kids thinking. I can see how training teachers in the DREAM academy will help them make this experience better for their students. – Steve



*Carol Kauffman
talks about the
keystone species
found in the Dragon
Run watershed.*

*Students from Aylett
Country Day School
recorded in their
notebooks the
species they
observed during the
kayak trip.*





Terry Skinner uses an inquiry-based approach when explaining the flora and fauna found in the watershed.



One student saw a skink sunning itself on a log.



Students from Light of the World Academy

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STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Box Turtles

By Kevin Howe, Treasurer



The Dragon Run watershed is the perfect habitat for one reptile everyone “loves” to see—the turtle. There are about 366 species of turtles on earth, seven of which are marine for all of their life except when the females crawl up the seashore to lay eggs. Of the 53 species found in the United States (more than any other country), Virginia can claim 18 freshwater, one terrestrial (woodland box turtle), one estuarine (northern diamond-backed terrapin) and five marine species. All the Virginia turtles lay their eggs on land; in fact, all turtles, with one world exception, lay their eggs on land—a lone Australian species is the only one capable of laying their eggs in the water.

Woodland Box Turtle

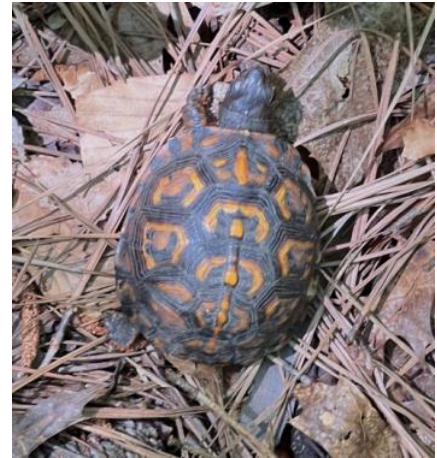
In the Dragon Run watershed, seven species have been recorded. Dragon Run is entirely freshwater so no marine or estuarine turtles would appear in the Dragon. We often see a few turtles on our kayak tours, typically sunning themselves on a log or in vegetation. And occasionally, when on a hike in Dragon Run, we encounter the woodland box turtle, our only turtle landlubber. More rarely, we have encountered one of the aquatic species laying eggs in the early spring on land.

Our terrestrial, forest-loving woodland box turtle is always a treat to see with its beautiful brown or even black shell and a variable pattern of orange to yellow markings. These markings are the perfect camouflage against the woodland leaf litter, so you must look closely to see and admire the markings.

The box turtle is a carnivore for about the first five years of life but thereafter it is an omnivore eating nearly anything from wild berries, Jack-in-the-pulpits, and

mayapples to carrion, slugs, and salamanders to even eating mushrooms – quite a buffet. Many of their favored foods are poisonous to humans such as toxic mushrooms and Jack-in-the-pulpits, but obviously they are no problem for the box turtles.

While the adults do not have many predators, their eggs and small juveniles are eaten by many predators from foxes to snakes. Once an adult, however, protection from some predators is aided by the box turtle's ability to pull its head and legs into its shell and then close the hinged shell so virtually nothing can reach it. Not all turtles can close their shell like that. While the woodland box turtle is terrestrial, it does occasionally enter the water, possibly to cool itself or evade a predator, or just to get a drink; so, don't be overly surprised to see one in the water.



Spring is the season when the female box turtle lays her eggs (May-July) which explains the increase in late spring sightings on the highways as the females search for a mate and nest site. Unlike many birds and mammals, box turtles, do not form cohesive social groups nor do they form pair bonds. In fact, they do not offer any parental care beyond nesting.

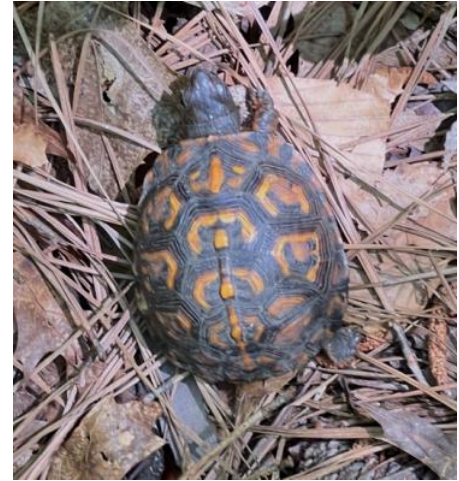
Other than mate, the male does nothing. The female digs the nest hole just a few inches in depth and lays 7-10 eggs which are then covered with soil and off she goes having performed her only maternal duty. Remarkably, the female woodland box turtle can



*Woodland Box Turtles--
Photos by Kevin Howe*



store sperm for long periods—even years—a useful adaptation for an animal that is not social and generally stays in a relatively small area. Research suggests that they stay within 700-800 feet from the spot where they hatched. Hatching of the eggs takes about three months and then the hatchlings are on their own. Woodland box turtles can live as long as humans with verified records of well over 50 years and one record suggesting a 114-year-old; not many animals can claim this feat.



Being cold blooded like other reptiles, the woodland box turtles in our area are not active in the winter. They enter a semi sleep-like state, called brumation, similar to the mammalian hibernation but hibernation in mammals is a deep sleep for the entire season. Brumation undertaken by reptiles is a deep sleep, but the reptiles will often wake up and eat-drink for up to a few days before returning to the brumation state. But when temperatures reach the fifties for five or so days, the woodland box will venture out. Their winter is spent in a shallow depression on the forest floor covered with leaves.



Sadly, many box turtles are killed crossing highways which bisect their forested habitat. Summer mornings following rain seems to be a particularly vulnerable time for the woodland box. I am always thrilled to see a motorist stop for a turtle, jump out and carry it off the road; please do the same thing if you see one on the road. Death by road is a significant cause of death to our box turtles, but human turtle-collecting for sale in the pet trade also has substantially reduced their populations. And, as with many of our native organisms, habitat loss through logging, farming and development have outright eliminated turtle habitat or caused such fragmentation of habitat that healthy populations that once existed can no longer be sustained.

*Woodland Box Turtles--Photos
by Kevin Howe*



Juvenile Woodland Box Turtle--Photo by Kevin Howe

Aside from the woodland box turtle, others reported in the Dragon Run watershed include the eastern musk, eastern painted, northern red-bellied cooter, snapping, spotted, and southeastern mud. Read more about them in my future "Streamside Attractions."

If you would like to learn more about the plants, animals, birds, and insects in the Dragon, be sure to check out "Swamp Sightings" on our website, DragonRun.org.

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York River and Small Coastal Basins Symposium

Returning for its first biennial appearance, the York River and Small Coastal Basins Symposium convened practitioners and residents throughout the York, Mobjack and Piankatank watersheds for a day of knowledge exchange and networking.

This forum, hosted by [CBNERR-VA](#) and the [York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable](#) on the [VIMS](#) campus, provided an opportunity to learn about watershed research, education, stewardship and management efforts, past, present and future, from a variety of regional perspectives.

The theme this year, *Collaborative Science Driving Broader Impacts*, begs the questions: Who does our science reach? How is it applied? What impact is it making? How are the studies, approaches and programs in place creating ripple effects throughout the York watershed system?

An array of engaging speakers made place-based presentations, in addition to a poster expo and networking.

Click here for presentation [summaries](#)

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Activities Calendar

| June | | Qualification Required |
|------------------|--|--|
| 13 | Dragon Keeper | FODR paddle crew qualification |
| 15 | Summer paddle season reservations open at 9 a.m. | |
| 22 | Teta Kaine Nature Preserve dedication at 10 a.m. | |
| 24 | CitSci bioblitz | |
| 25 | Scouting Trip for summer paddle | FODR paddle crew qualification |
| July | | Qualification Required |
| 5-7 | Workdays for summer paddle season | FODR paddle crew qualification |
| 14-15 | Paddle crew training | FODR member volunteers and property monitors |
| 17-18 | Paddle trips and hikes for youth organizations | FODR paddle crew qualifications |
| July 31-August 4 | DREAM | |
| August | | Qualification Required |
| 6 | Summer paddle cleanup | |
| 15 | Stewardship volunteer event | |
| 20 | Newsletter copy deadline | |
| 29 | Scouting trip for fall paddle season | FODR paddle crew qualification |



| September | | Qualification Required |
|-----------|---|--|
| 1 | Fall paddle season reservations open at 9 a.m. | |
| 10 | Dragon Keeper paddle trip | FODR paddle crew qualification |
| 10 | Newsletter published | |
| 12 | Scouting and preparation for nature hike—trails at Big Island Complex | FODR member volunteers and property monitors |
| 17 | Guided nature hike at Big Island Complex | FODR members and their guests |
| 19 | Stewardship volunteer event | |
| 20 | General meeting and speaker | |
| 30 | Trash pickup day—meet at RCC Glenns campus at 9 a.m. | |

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