



# The Dragon's Tale

Friends of Dragon Run

P. O. Box 882

Gloucester, VA. 23061

Volume XLI Issue 4 September 2022

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## President's Message

*Jeff Wright*

The growing membership and especially the growth in *active* members, is critical for FODR to fulfill the purpose in our bylaws which is . . . *the preservation, protection, and encouragement of wise use of the Dragon Run and its watershed.* [More](#)

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## General Meeting September 21

*Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird*

Katie Fallon will be the guest lecturer for the Friends of Dragon Run General Meeting on September 21. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. via [zoom](#). [More](#)

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*By Jack and Carol Kauffman, FODR Paddlemasters*

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## Dragonflies & Damselflies

*By Kevin Howe*

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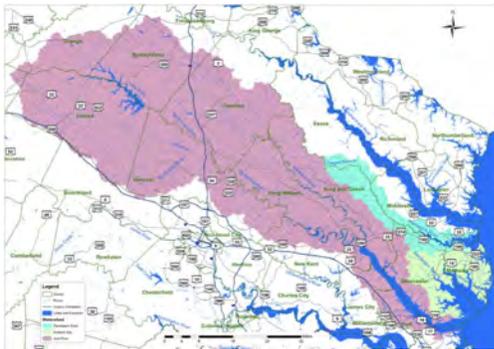
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*Meet at 9 a.m. at Rappahannock Community College, Glens Campus parking lot* [More](#)

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## The York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable

*By Jeff Wright*

Friends of Dragon Run is now a participant in the York River and Small Coastal Basin (YR&SCB) Roundtable comprised of federal and state agencies, local governments, local tribes, and non-governmental organizations. [More](#)

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## Volunteers Wanted!

We are always looking for members willing to volunteer for a variety of jobs within the organization. Here's a sample of some of the positions we need to fill. [More](#)

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**FODR Board of Directors**

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## President's Message

*Jeff Wright*

I want to thank our members for continuing our mission as we move through 2022. The considerable volunteer hours, donations, and annual dues from our members are key to FODR's success. FODR activities, such as paddle seasons and hikes, have introduced Dragon Run to many people during the first half of 2022. Many of these individuals have joined us as members. The growing membership and especially the growth in *active* members, is critical for FODR to fulfill the purpose in our bylaws which is . . . *the preservation, protection, and encouragement of wise use of the Dragon Run and its watershed.*



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We treasure Dragon Run. This important mission requires our efforts now and for future generations. To borrow a phrase from Theodore Roosevelt, *"We commit to treating natural resources as assets which we will turn over to the next generation increased; and not impaired in value."*

As an organization, we foster the protection and preservation of the entire Dragon Run swamp in its natural wilderness state. We are vigilant stewards of the land we own. We are also vigilant in working to thwart threats to Dragon Run and the amazing collection of flora and fauna that it supports. We never forget that we are a species of fauna that shares this treasured habitat with a wide range of species. This is biodiversity at its best. Pursuing the FODR purpose is hard work, but a rewarding labor of love for our volunteers. And we are always looking for even more volunteers!

Key aspects of our "wise use" of Dragon Run this year have included providing further opportunities for school-age youth and youth-focused organizations to visit and learn about the Dragon and supporting environmental justice initiatives. Additionally, we plan to continue adding hikes, paddle trips, and strengthening our stewardship management plans for each of FODR's properties. We continue to work with other organizations to foster preservation and protection of the Dragon and to expand knowledge about its amazing biodiversity and complex history. Bottomline: Active members make it happen.

The summer paddle season was a success thanks to the work of our member volunteers. We will announce our fall paddle season and fall hikes soon so stay tuned. Hope to see you at a FODR event.

Best of the seasons.

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## **General Meeting September 21**

### *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird*

Katie Fallon will be the guest lecturer for the Friends of Dragon Run General Meeting on September 21. The meeting will be held at 7 p.m. via zoom. (Click for the [Zoom](#) link and instructions for entering the meeting.)

Vultures are an amazing and important resident of the Dragon Run watershed. However, vultures are often overlooked, underappreciated, and unloved, despite the vital roles they play in healthy ecosystems. Worldwide, vultures are primarily scavengers; they can help stop the spread of disease by quickly and efficiently removing dead animals from the landscape. Unfortunately, due to poisoning, direct persecution, habitat loss, and other threats, vultures are more likely to be threatened or endangered than any other group of raptors.



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But in the Western Hemisphere, Turkey and Black vultures counter this trend and are increasing in number. Based on Katie Fallon's recent book, this fun presentation will explore the life and times of the noble Turkey vulture, including its feeding, nesting, and roosting habits, migratory behaviors, and common misconceptions. Katie will also discuss what it's like to be up-close-and-personal with Turkey and Black vultures through her work with the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia.

Katie Fallon is the author of two nonfiction books: *Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird* (2020, 2017) and *Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird* (2011), as well as two books for children. She is a founder of the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia, a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving the region's wild birds through research, education, and rehabilitation, and has served as President of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society. A member of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators, Katie has worked with birds since 1998; over the last twenty years she has given educational presentations featuring live raptors, vultures, parrots, and corvids. She is also a columnist for *Bird Watcher's Digest* and has taught writing at West Virginia University, Virginia Tech, and elsewhere. Her first word was "bird." Go to her website ([www.katiefallon.com](http://www.katiefallon.com)) for more information about Katie and her fascinating work.

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## How to Zoom

Topic: FODR General Membership Meeting

Time: Sep 21, 2022, 07:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87233073557?pwd=eEQrVG04Z291UTlhMCtjdjdUVkpTZz09>

Meeting ID: 872 3307 3557

Passcode: 178606

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,87233073557#,,,,\*178606# US (New York)

+16469313860,,87233073557#,,,,\*178606# US

Dial by your location

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 646 931 3860 US

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 309 205 3325 US

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 386 347 5053 US

+1 564 217 2000 US

+1 669 444 9171 US

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

+1 719 359 4580 US

Meeting ID: 872 3307 3557

Passcode: 178606

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87233073557?pwd=eEQrVG04Z291UTlhMCtjdjdUVkpTZz09>

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## **Another Successful Paddle Season**

*By Jack and Carol Kauffman, FODR Paddlemasters*

Friends of Dragon Run held another successful summer paddle season this year. During 13 regular paddles, FODR guides escorted 97 guests on a three-hour educational tour of the Dragon. We were also pleased to have a group of teenagers join us from the Gloucester 4H Club. The weather treated us well, with no rain outs and just enough rain in the afternoon / evenings to keep our kayakers floating over obstacles. Most of the guests were first timers on the Dragon, although some previous paddlers from other trips returned. Because of the threat of Covid, we again held round-trip paddles, leaving and returning to our Big Island Complex launch site to avoid shuttling guests in cars on one-way trips.

The beavers had been active prior to the summer season because of historically low water levels for this time of year. We traveled over six beaver dams at the start of the season and added another dam gate a week later. Some of the highlights



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were the bald cypress, as always, lizard's tail, pickerel weed, spatterdock, cardinal flower, swamp milkweed, and smartweed. The royal ferns around the large buttressed bald cypress and their many knees captured the fancy of many guests. The 4-H teenagers were especially excited to tell their parents that they tasted smartweed. Hearing our guides describe the resurrection fern, mistletoe, the ancient bald cypress (between 800-1000 years old), and the three keystone species (bald cypress, beaver, and woodpecker) intrigued both younger and older guests.

This summer we experienced more American bur-reed and dodder (see photos) than in years past. Bur-weed is a native emergent plant whose seeds are relished by waterfowl; muskrats feed extensively on the entire plant. Dodder is a native flowering plant but is a total parasite with no chlorophyll. In the Dragon, we see it some years and not others; but it occurs everywhere not just in swamps. It is loathed by farmers.

We were glad to see butterflies (mostly tiger swallowtails) on the Dragon despite the low numbers showing up on the butterfly counts this year. We certainly had a lot of damsel flies (mostly ebony jewelwing).

Our crew of eighteen volunteers did a fantastic job assisting guests and received great reviews for their efforts. They make trips down the Dragon extra special.



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*Lizard's Tail*



*Pickerel Weed*



*American Bur-reed*



*Dodder*

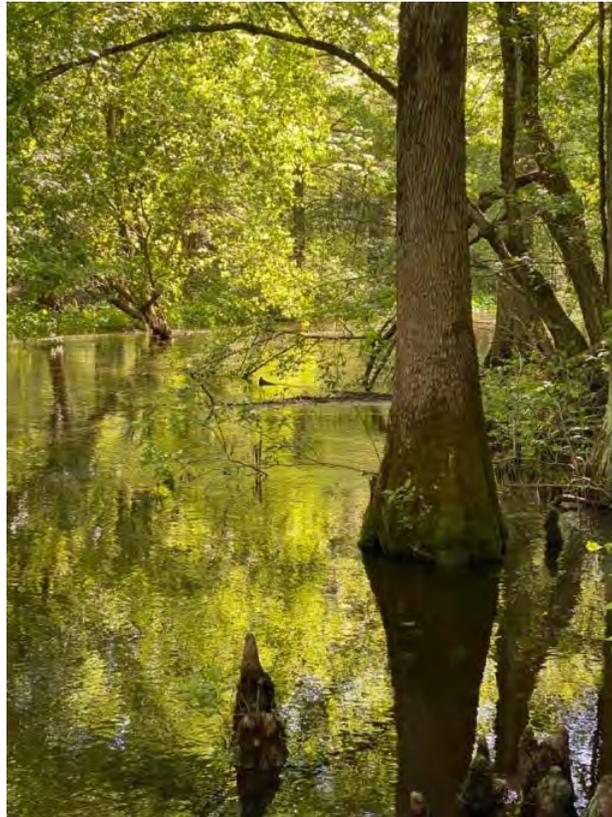
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## **Another Reason to Love the Dragon: Carbon Sequestration**

*By Jeff Wright*

Yup, the Dragon and its amazing watershed provide another important service to the planet and to all of us on the planet. Fresh water swamps and wetlands are carbon sinks capable of sequestering significant amounts of carbon. Wetlands are vital natural assets that facilitate long-term storage of carbon.

The wetlands and bordering forests of Dragon Run are always working for us.

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## Flipcause Update

*by Carol Kauffman, FODR Vice President*

In February 2022, the FODR Board voted to adopt a Customer Relations Management System (CRM) called Flipcause. Data from FODR's records was migrated into Flipcause in March and at the same time a new FODR website managed by Flipcause was launched. The new website has been used since April to register new and renewing memberships and to accept donations. It offers users the option to pay the credit card processing fees relieving FODR of that expense. It also allows users to select automatic annual renewals. The system generates and sends automatic receipts.



*The FODR homepage has been redesigned using Flipcause and enables FODR Board members to easily make updates.*

The Flipcause CRM has been a great asset in tracking our members and generating email lists. The system has also been used to sell the Dragon Run prints by Christian Johnson. For the summer paddle season, Flipcause was used to register guests. This streamlined the event signup by registering all guests (not just the person making the registration for a group of paddlers) and automatically creating a profile for each paddler.

Every registrant for the summer paddle opted to pay the credit card processing fee. Flipcause does this without the annoying pop-up ads we had to put up with using



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our old system. Tracking finances from the paddle registrations is now easy, and thank you emails and receipts are sent to each paddle registrant.

The system was also used for the sale of our merchandise during the summer paddle season. A Flipcause phone app enabled volunteers at the paddle site to process merchandise sales and credit card payments. It provides an easy way to track sales and emails the purchaser a receipt.

FODR's President, Vice President, Treasurer, Communications Director, and Membership Chair have been trained to use Flipcause to generate reports for Board meetings. The FODR Treasurer also uses automatically generated reports from Flipcause each month to help create the Treasurer's monthly report.

We have been happy with the support the vendor has provided and expect to expand the use of the system in coming months.

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## **2022 Fall Paddle Season**

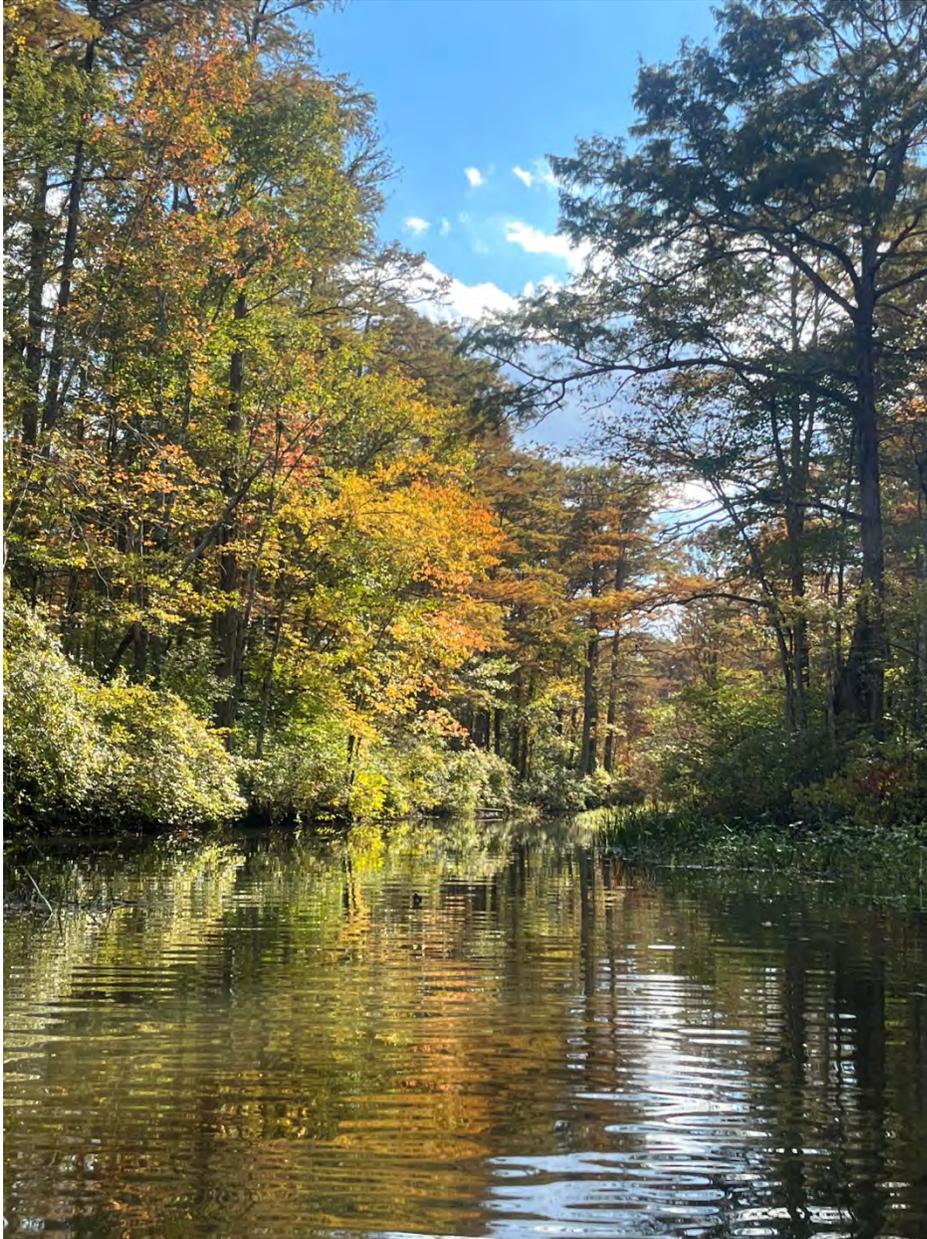
*by Jack and Carol Kauffman, FODR Paddlemasters*

Sign-ups for the fall paddle season open September 1. Trips run from October 20 through November 1. Fall is a wonderful time to paddle Dragon Run. The bald cypress trees take on a rust color and the silky dogwood and winterberry bushes provide lots of red along the banks of the Dragon. Migrating birds stop to feed on the bright red berries which are high in fat and provide the nutrients that the birds need during migration.



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Fall temperatures are perfect for paddling (not too cold and not too hot), and the water is still relatively warm. A team will scout the Dragon for the best route prior to sign-ups in September. The word has spread that FODR trips are fun and educational, so we anticipate that our paddle season registration will fill quickly.

If you have never paddled with us, please consider our fall season paddle trips. If you have paddled with us, why not return and experience the beauty of this

remarkable place during the fall. If you would like to volunteer to join our paddle crew for the fall season, email us at [PaddleMasterDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:PaddleMasterDragonRun@gmail.com).

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*Blue Catfish*



*Snakehead Fish*

## **Fascinating Presentation on Fishes that Live in the Dragon at the FODR June General Meeting**

Dr. Eric Hilton was the guest speaker at the FODR general meeting held in June. His presentation was entitled "Fishes in the Dragon: Hidden Treasures in the Middle Peninsula." He is a Professor of Fisheries Science at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science and William and Mary. For more than 20 years he has been researching all aspects of fish biology from biogeography to genetics.

You could tell from Dr. Hilton's descriptions of the various species that he finds fishes to be fascinating and beautiful. He identified some of the approximately 62 species that can be found in the Dragon and talked about some of their interesting



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characteristics. A partial list of the species that Dr. Hilton identified are listed in the shaded box below.

Dr. Hilton pointed out that the blue-spotted sunfish, about four inches long, is a dominant species in the Dragon and it has a round tail versus the forked tail found on many other species. Male pirate fish guard their nests. An American eel can live between 20 and 30 years. They are born in the Sargasso Sea and move into freshwater rivers where they remain until ready to spawn. Then they return to the Sargasso Sea.

Bowfins are ancient fish. The species we see today is very similar to the same species that lived more than 100 million years ago. Male bowfins aggressively defend a larval ball until the larvae can live on their own. Bowfins are easily confused with snakehead fish.

Snakehead fish are an aggressive, non-native fish. They are effective predators and could eradicate native species. Blue catfish are also invasive and large numbers live in the Dragon; however, it is unknown how far up the Dragon they live.

The next FODR [general meeting](#) will be held on September 21 at 7 p.m. by zoom.

<b>Partial List of Fish Species in Dragon Run</b>	
American eel	Creek chubsucker
Bass	Eels
Small	Gar
Large	Golden shiner
Striped	Mummichog
Black crappie	Northern snakehead
Blue catfish	Pirate fish
Bluegill	Sunfish
Bowfins	Banded
Carp	Blue-spotted

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## **STREAMSIDE ATTRACTIONS: Dragonflies & Damselflies**

*By Kevin Howe*

One of the many delights of a Dragon Run kayak trip is that we encounter very few biting insects on the water. Why, you ask? Because we have a healthy, balanced ecosystem and between the fish in the water, birds in the air, and predatory insects in both the water and the air, the little biting annoyers get eaten very quickly.



Among the Dragon's most abundant insect predators are the *dragonflies* and

*Autumn meadowhawk*



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*damselflies*, scientifically classified in a group called the Odonata. Members of this easily recognized insect group are all quite voracious insectivores (insect eaters) both in their aquatic larval stage and in the adult stage. While the two are quite similar, the adult dragonflies are usually larger than damselflies and hold their wings straight out or slightly up and V-shaped (airplane-like). Adult damselflies, on the other hand, are mostly smaller and hold their wings over their body when at rest.

Dragonflies and damselflies begin life as an egg which is laid by the female in wet areas - usually in water or on vegetation over water. For a short period (seconds to minutes), they live off nutrients in the egg but soon develop into a predaceous larvae feeding on all other aquatic animals including small fish. They occupy the bottom of nearly all permanent water bodies where they are often the dominant invertebrate predator. Like all insects, they have an external skeleton so the only way to grow is to shed (molt) that skeleton and grow a new larger exterior skeleton - each stage of growing a new exterior skeleton is called an instar.



*Needham's skimmer – this 2-inch coastal plain dragonfly may be the most common one in Dragon Run*



*Ebony Jewelwing – this 1.5-2-inch damselfly is the most common one we see on the Dragon.*



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Dragonflies and damselflies may go through as many 10-15 or more instars before undergoing the major transformation (molt) from aquatic crawling larvae to flying terrestrial adult. The length of their larval life varies greatly between species. Some live a larval life for less than one month (in the tropics) while other species spend four or five years as a larva (cooler-colder climates). Although the larvae can be very numerous, most folks never see them because of their aquatic habitats.

In their last instar, this aquatic larva typically crawls up and out of the water onto something such as a stick or vegetation and goes through an amazing metamorphosis to become a dragonfly or damselfly. This adult will not live long – weeks or months at most – much less than the larvae. The adults, at least in our region, never survive the winter although the eggs and their larvae go through the winter. the metamorphosis from larvae to adult is a totally amazing change in all aspects – from looks through ecology.



*Common whitetail – this distinctive 2-3-inch dragonfly is found throughout North America*



*Blue-tipped dancer – this 1.5-inch dragonfly often lands on kayaks and people*



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As adults, dragonflies and damselflies have awesome adaptations for catching their prey which is most often done while flying. Watch them sometime and you will see that they are seemingly erratic in their flight; but actually, they are as precise as any flying Naval Blue Angel.



*Banded pennant – this small 1.5-inch dragonfly is often seen in Dragon Run*

The erratic, yet exacting, flight of a dragonfly or damselfly is a result of adaptations for seeing, flying, capturing, and eating their prey. If you have seen one up close, you know they have two huge compound eyes. Each eye has up to 30,000 lenses and each lens functions independently of the others, sending individual info to the brain. So, when an insect flies in front of the eyes of the dragonfly or damselfly, its brain gathers that information and processes and it can predict, with deadly accuracy, where the prey will be in the future so that the dragonfly or damselfly can fly to that exact future spot and capture the prey when it arrives.

Their eye-to-brain neurons (nerves) along with their brain processing power, pass and process the prey-moving information far faster than any supercomputer we have developed. Further adaptations include: 1) wing muscles which allow each of their four wings to operate, not only independently, but also move in virtually any direction allowing for precision flight and turns; 2) long spiny legs which grab and hold prey then pass it to their hard sharp mandibles which easily chew through any hard-shelled insect. Their prey can be the size of the smallest fly or as large as a butterfly and there are even numerous records of large dragonflies taking down hummingbirds! Ain't nature grand!

Virginia has more than 140 species of dragonflies and more than 50 species of damselflies – I bet not many of you knew that little fact. We have one of the most diverse groups of dragonflies and damselflies in North America. As mentioned,



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the adults do not overwinter, but we can find adults from late March through November flying around. About 300 million years ago, the earth's adult dragonflies were about the size of a pigeon; but today, in Virginia, they range from less than one inch to a little more than three inches.

On a sunny day in Dragon Run, we typically see anywhere from a dozen to hundreds of dragonflies and damselflies from three to more than ten different species. The importance of this group cannot be understated – not only do they keep many flying-biting insects in check, but they are an indicator of good water quality. We see lots on the Dragon, so be sure to paddle with us and see dragonflies, damselflies, and the Dragon's great water quality. You'll get a real appreciation for this awesome part of the Dragon's fauna.

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## **Trash Pickups Resume September 24**

*Meet at 9 a.m. at Rappahannock Community College, Glens Campus parking lot*

Friends of Dragon Run strives not only to protect and preserve the Dragon, but also to be an effective member of the communities surrounding Dragon Run. One of the ways we accomplish this goal is through our trash pickups. Four times a year, FODR volunteers comb the roadsides along three of the bridges that cross the Dragon: Route 603 at Mascot; Route 17; Route 602 at Ware's bridge.

During four cleanups in 2021 and two cleanups in 2022, FODR volunteers picked up more than 7,800 items weighing more than 1,250 pounds. FODR's trash collection efforts make a significant difference in the amount of trash swept into the Dragon. Plus, all items collected are logged into the Ocean Conservancy Clean Swell app that records the trash collected and combines it



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with data from other organizations. All plastic, glass, and metal containers, tires and all other metal items are recycled.

This year's next two pickups will be held September 24 and November 19. Pickups in 2023 will be held in February, April, September, and November.

Trash pickups are open to FODR members, their families, and the public. Volunteers are provided with safety vests, gloves, trash bags, and pickup sticks. Join us September 24—it's a great way to spend time outdoors and get to know other FODR volunteers while doing a needed public service.

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## The York River and Small Coastal Basin Roundtable

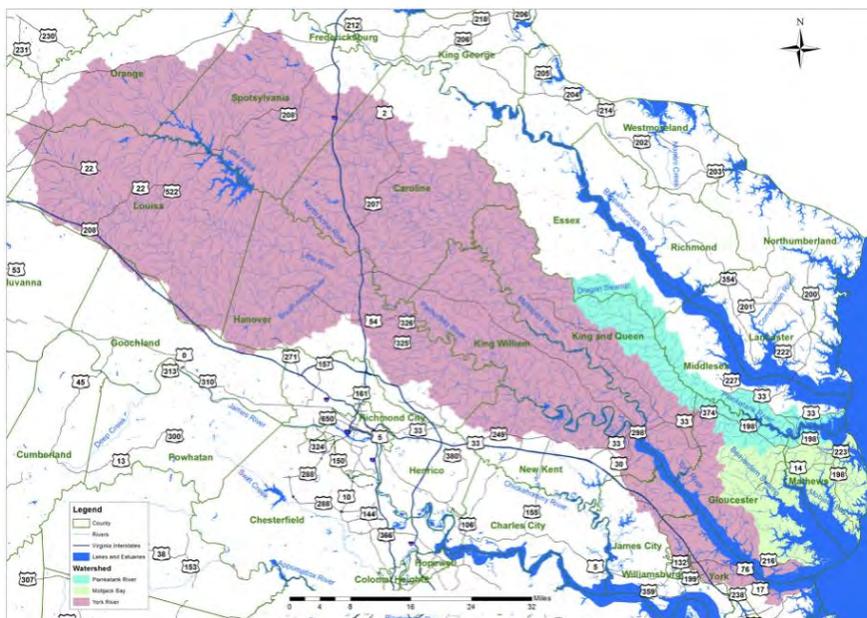
*By Jeff Wright*

Friends of Dragon Run is now a participant in the York River and Small Coastal Basin (YR&SCB) Roundtable comprised of federal and state agencies, local governments, local tribes, and non-governmental organizations.

The YR&SCB Roundtable provides a forum for information sharing and collaboration among water quality and conservation-minded stakeholders within the York River, Mobjack Bay and Piankatank River watershed areas. The Piankatank River watershed comprises much of Dragon Run in the forum's work. The YR&SCB Roundtable supports Virginia's effort to protect water quality and conserve coastal resources such as wetland areas for the

betterment of its communities. It is addressing both tidal and non-tidal waters.

In addition to the full roundtable, FODR is a participant on the Habitat Restoration Steering Committee. The Committee is working on conservation and restoration strategies for tidal and adjacent non-tidal wetlands.



The map below shows the areas addressed by the forum. The blue/green area represents the Piankatank River and the Dragon Run watershed.

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## Volunteers Wanted!

Friends of Dragon Run requires a lot of members who volunteer\* their time and expertise to manage all the tasks needed to make FODR function effectively. We are always looking for members willing to volunteer for a variety of jobs within the organization. Here's a sample of some of the positions we need to fill. Don't see anything you like? Contact [VicePresidentDragonRun@gmail.com](mailto:VicePresidentDragonRun@gmail.com) for other opportunities.

### Communications Assistant

Under the direction of the Communications Director, communication assistants will write and edit newsletter articles, news releases, website content, and social media.

### Graphic Designer

This volunteer (under the direction of the Communications Director) would use their training in graphic design to create layouts for newsletters, web pages, brochures, reports, and posters.

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\* FODR is a volunteer organization. There are no paid positions.



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## **Property Monitors**

These volunteers monitor FODR's properties on a quarterly basis. They walk the property trails and boundaries looking for damage, invasive plants, and evidence of vandalism. They perform light maintenance and trash pick-up. They report the condition of the property and any problems or repairs needed to the Property Manager.

## **Merchandise Manager**

The FODR merchandise manager maintains FODR's actual inventory of shirts and hats, records the inventory in an Excel spreadsheet, places orders for merchandise, helps select new items, and trains and schedules assistants to sell merchandise at paddles. In the future, this volunteer could be responsible for online sales and shipping. The merchandise manager works directly with paddle masters and FODR Board members.

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## **FODR Board of Directors**

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Carol Kauffman  
Vice President

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Anne Atkins

Katie Hawks

Molly Broderson

Jack Kauffman

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