

SUMMER 2024

THE RAPPAHANNOCK REPORT

The Rappahannock Group Sierra Club Newsletter



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OUTINGS RECAP

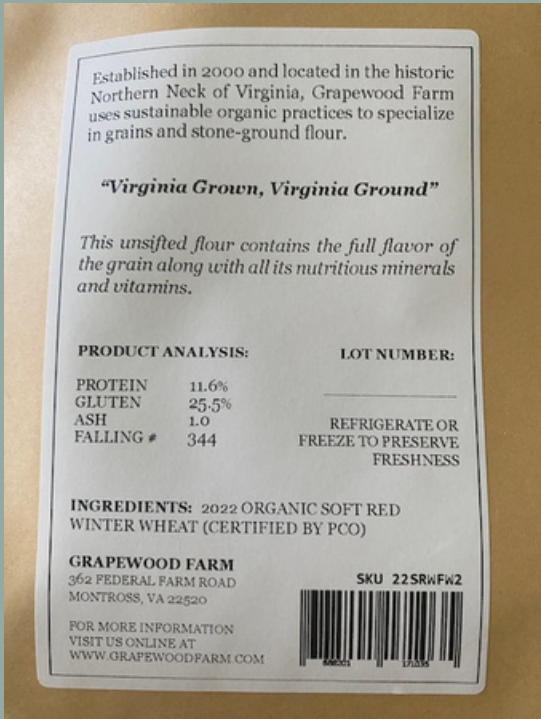
by Geoff Johnson

The Rappahannock Group Sierra Club (RGSC) held three Outings in the past quarter. Our April Outing supported Spotsylvania's 5th Annual Spring Community Cleanup Day on Saturday, April 6th. This is the second year RGSC has supported Spotsylvania Parks & Rec Cleanup Day. Afterwards, we had lunch at Itavie New York Grill & Bakery near the courthouse.

Our May Outing was a return to Grapewood Farm in Montross, VA. Grapewood specializes in organic small grains and stone ground flours. The farm is dedicated to the good stewardship of the land and to managing its natural resources in a sustainable manner. They use no-till and reduced tillage, cover crops and crop rotation to reduce damage and rebuild soil fertility. Grapewood Farm is owned and operated by the Sachs family. They are recipients of the RGSC Living Green Award. After the tour, we had a wonderful lunch at the Art of Coffee in downtown Montross.

OUTINGS RECAP

Learn more about Grapewood Farm at <https://www.grapewoodfarm.com/>



OUTINGS RECAP

Our June Outing was a tour of the R-Board solid waste facility on Eskimo Hill Road in Stafford, VA. Phil Hathcock, Director of the Landfill, provided a guided tour of the facility and discussed the functions, purpose, and future plans for the landfill. All the recycling material collected at the landfill is shipped to TFC Recycling in Chester, VA. A future Outing will be scheduled to tour the TFC facility. We enjoyed lunch at Amy's Cafe in Falmouth afterwards.

As always, these Outings are free and open to the public. If you would like to be on the email list for future RGSC Outings, please email Geoff Johnson <geoffwithrgsc@gmail.com>



PFAS REGULATION UPDATE

by Zoe Hanrahan

Polyfluoroalkyl substances, better known as PFAS, are a group of synthetic chemicals that are used in everyday products ranging from tampons to tap water and have been found in the blood of every American. They have earned the nickname forever chemicals because of how slowly they break down, some lasting thousands of years. This slow breakdown allows PFAS to build up in humans and our environment and can result in a large range of health problems, including but not limited to decreased fertility, increased risk of cancer, and reduced ability of people's immune systems.

It's not just humans who are at risk from PFAS. They also impact wildlife in negative ways. PFAS can change the PH levels of the soil, harming native plants. PFAS also reduces the reproduction rate and increases disease rates in animals.

Recognizing the harm PFAS can cause, in 2021 the Biden-Harris Administration announced that they would launch accelerated efforts to help protect against their negative impacts. As part of this initiative, in 2021, the EPA announced the PFAS Strategic Roadmap. This roadmap includes timelines and specific actions that the EPA plans to commit to protect people's health, protect the environment, and hold polluters accountable. The timeline depicted on the PFAS Strategic Roadmap spans from 2021 to 2024.

In April of this year there were two big wins with the PFAS Strategic Roadmap when it comes to managing PFAS and protecting both ourselves and our environment. The first came in the form of the PFAS National Primary Drinking Water Regulation, which is the first legally enforceable drinking water standard involving six different types of PFAS.

PFAS REGULATION UPDATE

Under this new regulation, drinking water was given a Maximum Contaminant Level for each type of the six PFAS that fall under the regulation. Following this, public water systems will have three years to complete their initial monitoring of PFAS. Afterward, they will have to continue monitoring PFAS levels and provide the public with information on the levels of PFAS in their drinking water beginning in 2027. In five years, they must implement solutions to reduce PFAS levels if they exceed the Maximum Contaminant Levels and if these levels are violated, they must alert the public to it.

In addition, on April 19, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS), two of the most common types of PFAS, were classified as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. This new classification will enable investigation, cleanup, and reports if there are any leaks involving these two PFAS and ensure that polluters pay to clean up the contamination they caused.

Even with these two excellent announcements, there is still plenty of work to be done when it comes to mitigating the harm that PFAS can cause. To learn more about the EPA's progress in following their roadmap the EPA posts their latest updates on their website.

Meanwhile, while new rules and regulations are created to help fight against the negative effects of PFAS, you might be wondering what you can do. You can avoid exposure by not eating food in grease-resistant packaging, replacing your non-stick pans, helping advocate for regulations surrounding PFAS, joining organizations that help fight against PFAS, and helping to educate people about the harm that PFAS can cause.

TIPS FOR THOUGHT



by Paula Chow

Whether in drought or time of plenty, water conservation should be an ongoing practice. Adults need to be models for the children who will inherit what is and isn't left behind. One only needs to witness the low Rappahannock River level, the browning of the grassy areas, and the stress on trees and shrubs coupled with the heat waves to understand that we can not operate our households as usual.

Grey water is any water that can be reused for outdoor plants. Fruits and vegetables can be rinsed over a bowl or bucket that is collected and then used to water outdoor plants. So, too, with rinsed rice water or water from steamed veggies or boiled corn. Don't throw out that leftover ice in your cup. As for the bathroom, "if it's yellow, it's mellow; if it's brown, flush it down."

Assuring that we really pay attention to turning the faucet off when we are not directly using it (doing dishes is the typical example) is a new good habit to acquire if you don't already have that habit. Pay attention to your pre-adolescent and adolescents shower habits – it is the RGSC's experience via Earth Day and D.A.R.E. graduation pledges that they typically take very long showers, between 20 – 30 minutes! Parents need to take note and work on water conservation.

These are not extreme measures. Imagine if we were to experience an extreme drought. It can happen. Let's conserve our precious water resources.

BATS IN DISTRESS



by *Nathan Ferm*

Our local bat populations in and around Fredericksburg, VA are facing a significant threat from White-Nose Syndrome (WNS). This devastating fungal disease, caused by *Pseudogymnoascus destructans*, has been wreaking havoc on bat colonies across North America. It thrives in the cold, damp environments of caves and mines where bats hibernate, appearing as a white, powdery growth on the muzzles, ears, and wings of affected bats.

Bats are crucial to our ecosystem, providing natural pest control by consuming vast amounts of insects each night. In the regions surrounding the Fredericksburg area, species such as the Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), Northern Long-Eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), Tricolored Bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*), and Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*) are particularly affected by WNS. These species play vital roles in maintaining ecological balance, yet they are experiencing severe population declines due to this disease.

White-Nose Syndrome disrupts hibernation, causing infected bats to wake more frequently and burn through their fat reserves needed to survive the winter. This results in starvation and dehydration, further weakening them. The fungus also causes damage to wing tissues, impairing their ability to fly and forage effectively once they emerge from hibernation. Mortality rates in some affected colonies can reach up to 100%. The spread of *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* is facilitated by bat-to-bat contact and possibly through human activity in hibernation sites. The disease has led to significant declines in bat populations, which in turn affects insect control and agricultural health. With fewer bats, pest populations can increase, leading to greater reliance on chemical pesticides and further ecological imbalance.

BATS IN DISTRESS

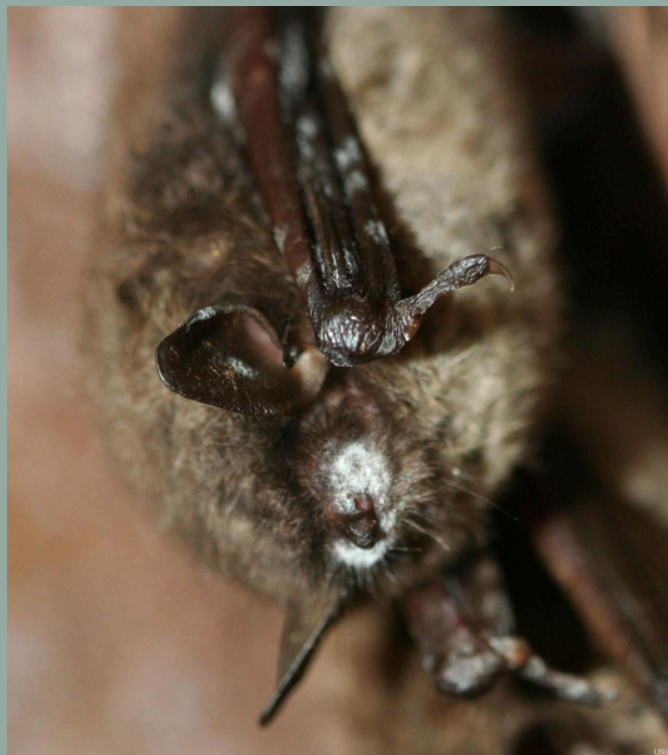
There are several steps we can take to help lessen the impact of WNS. Continued research into the disease and its impacts is vital. Supporting monitoring efforts helps track the spread of the disease and assess the effectiveness of conservation strategies. Protecting existing hibernation sites and managing them to minimize human disturbance can help reduce the spread of WNS. Restricting access to caves and mines during hibernation periods is a crucial step. Educating the public about the importance of bats and the threats they face can help garner support for conservation efforts. Simple actions like decontaminating clothing and equipment used in caves can prevent the spread of the fungus. Installing bat houses provides safe roosting sites for bats, helping them find suitable habitats away from the threats posed by WNS.

Bat houses are specially designed structures that provide bats with safe, warm, and dry places to roost and raise their young. These houses mimic the crevices and tight spaces bats naturally seek out, offering protection from predators and the elements. By installing bat houses, we can help mitigate the loss of natural habitats and provide bats with alternatives to roost. Bat houses offer a safe environment away from the threats of WNS-infected hibernation sites. Providing roosting options can help stabilize local bat populations and support their recovery. With healthy bat populations, we can rely on these nocturnal predators to naturally control insect populations, rather than chemical pesticides.

BATS IN DISTRESS

Promoting bat houses in our communities is a collective effort. Organize bat house building workshops, and engage local schools, community groups, and environmental organizations to participate in installing and maintaining bat houses. Collaborate with environmental groups such as Bat Conservation International to access resources and support. Offering incentives or recognition programs for landowners who install bat houses can also encourage wider participation.

Our bats are in crisis, and they need our help. By promoting bat houses and supporting conservation efforts, we can make a significant impact. Join us in safeguarding the future of these vital nocturnal guardians. Together, we can ensure that our skies remain filled with the silent wings of bats, protecting our environment and preserving our natural heritage.



RECYCLE YOUR OLD BICYCLES

by Victoria Gallaway

Do you have an old bike that you just don't ride anymore? Or one that you would donate, but it needs repairs? Don't throw it away! The R-Board and Stafford Community Church have partnered to accept old bikes, even those that need some work, to give them another life cycle. They repair these bikes and give them to members of the community who need them.

You can drop your bicycle off at the Stafford County Regional Landfill, or reach out to Mark DeCoursey to arrange a drop-off time at the Stafford Community Church. His email is mark@staffordcrossing.org.

Project Belong and the Department of Social Services accepts children's bikes, and Micah Ecumenical Ministries accept bikes intended for adults. Bikes are a valuable way to get around, especially for people who are unable to get a driver's license or can't afford a car.

The idea was born with the retired landfill worker, Roy Whaling, and later instigated by members of the Stafford Board of Supervisors, and now the vision is enacted by volunteers at the Stafford Community Church.

This has been largely successful so far, and over 75 bikes have been restored. Just as many that are still being worked on. The initiative is an example of a government program that has helped residents, and the National Association of Counties gave them the 2024 Achievement Award to reflect this success.

<https://www.fredericksburgfreepress.com/2024/06/22/115243/>



2024 LIVING GREEN AWARD

by Natalie Loeffler and Paula Chow

Friends of the Rappahannock is the 2024 Living Green Award recipient.

The Living Green Award was created in 2010 to honor and promote organizations and businesses who practice and operate sustainably and in environmentally friendly ways. The recipients are presented the Living Green Award on stage at the annual Earth Day festival at Old Mill Park in Fredericksburg. This is Rappahannock Group's fourteenth annual Living Green Award.



2024 LIVING GREEN AWARD

“The Living Green Award is gifted by the Rappahannock Group Sierra Club to recognize groups in the region who have demonstrated exceptional steps and initiative in environmental actions. Whether it’s through advocacy, education, or community engagement, these small businesses and organizations are bringing the Rappahannock community together to make our world a greener place.

This year, we are proud to present the Living Green Award to an organization who has been leading environmental stewardship on the Rappahannock since 1985. In the past few years, their efforts in litter removal, environmental education, and the conservation of natural resources have immensely aided in the health of the river and surrounding communities. Their litter removal project has collected 4k lbs of litter from the riverbanks. Their partnerships with local businesses have repurposed discarded oyster shells to rebuild our oyster reefs. Planting 35k trees along the riverbank and engaging 11k students in 2023 alone, they have raised awareness about the importance of river health, bringing the Rappahannock community together. They truly deserve the title of River Friends.

It is my pleasure to present this year’s Living Green Award to the Friends of the Rappahannock.”

EARTH DAY

Thank you to everyone who stopped by at Earth Day! We had a number of poster boards educating people on sustainable toilet papers, the harm of single use plastics, and our local influx of data centers. The kids completed “Dear Mother Earth” pledges to make a commitment to protect the planet.



ENVIRONMENTAL PASSPORT

by Paula Chow

The Rappahannock Group Sierra Club (RGSC) is planning to provide activities for children at the Mayfield/NAACP Community Day on Saturday, **July 13th**. The City of Fredericksburg's Fire Department will be presenting information about the petroleum pipeline that runs through the Mayfield neighborhood. The parents will leave the children outdoors to engage in the activities while they attend the presentation indoors.

RGSC has created an Environmental Passport for each child to bring to our three tent canopies, where there will be one or two activities in each. The activities include bird identification, planting seeds and learning about pollinators, writing a Dear Mother Earth pledge, coloring a monarch butterfly, and listing ideas on how to make Mayfield a better community. Upon completion of each activity, the passport will be stamped and the filled passport of the four stations will earn the child a wildlife bookmark. The parents will receive a sheet of the list of activities we are providing.

Thank you to all the committee members who participated. This is RGSC's first event involving environmental justice.



The **IMPACT** of Data Centers in Our **COMMUNITY**



July 24, 2024

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

1201 Caroline Street Fredericksburg, VA 22401

Join Friends of the Rappahannock and the Rappahannock Group of the Sierra Club for an **educational event on data centers and the impacts they have on our community.**

Staff members from both organizations will deliver a one-hour presentation, followed by a Q&A session to address any inquiries or concerns.

Hosted by:



RAPPAHANNOCK GROUP
SIERRA CLUB

Additional details contact:

Brent Hunsinger at brent.hunsinger@riverfriends.org

Cindy at RappahannockGroupSierraClub@gmail.com

TRAVELOGUE NEW ZEALAND

by Paula Chow

In February 2023, category 3 Cyclone Gabrielle devastated the West Auckland region of New Zealand (NZ) with subsequent flooding, closing impassable roads for 6 weeks with 11 fatalities and costing over \$1 billion.

Napier, in the Hawkes Bay, suffered an earthquake that decimated the city in February 1931. Hence, the rebuilt city is an art deco city, with an annual 3-day festival in February.

After WWII, New Zealand sought to entice many Europeans to settle there. Among others were Norwegians when 19 families immigrated to the North Island region of Dannevirke for farming, sheep being the major product. One particular Norwegian man, Olaf, had visited NZ, before the war, really loving the country. With NZ's recruitment efforts after WWII, Olaf moved to NZ, married, bought a farm with sheep and started their business, now world known, Norsewear. The NZ style is influenced by the Norwegian patterns.

The sheep population has decreased from 70 to 35 million as they converted to raising cattle due to market demands. Dairy is a major export.

