



**Friends of Huntley Meadows Park
Summer 2022 Newsletter**

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Donate or Renew Membership¹



Friends of Huntley Meadows Park uses funds received from dues and donations to financially support new Park initiatives and programs and to advocate for protection of Huntley Meadows Park as a wildlife preserve.

Click on the Donate or Renew Membership² link to make your payment/donation using the PayPal feature on the **Membership page** of the FOHMP website. To make a donation from the Membership page, click on the yellow Donate button. For memberships, scroll to the bottom of the page to view options.

¹<http://www.fohmp.org/membership.html>

²<http://www.fohmp.org/membership.html>

Message from the Interim President



By: Ben Jesup

Interim, adj.: temporary, provisional.

Cathy Ledec, after many years of extraordinary service to Friends of Huntley Meadows Park (FOHMP), has stepped down as FOHMP President and moved from the area. Cathy's energy and determination on behalf of FOHMP has been inspiring to witness. Her leadership was instrumental in all of FOHMP's accomplishments during her tenure. Those accomplishments include:

1. Alteration of Dominion Energy's transmission-line rebuild project along the southern boundary of the Park. With Cathy's leadership, FOHMP succeeded in getting Dominion to change their project design, including lowering the planned monopoles. This reduced the risk of birds colliding with the top grounding wire and protected the historic viewshed from Historic Huntley looking south over Hybla Valley.
2. Removal of two proposed conceptual paved bike trails through the Park from Fairfax County's Countywide Bicycle Master Plan. Building those trails would have caused permanent destruction of natural and historic resources, some of which are rare, and would have unfavorably altered the hydrology of the Park.
3. A tenfold increase of FOHMP's annual budget during Cathy's tenure, allowing FOHMP to donate more than \$200,000 to support programs and natural-resource management at the Park. The long-term financial sustainability of FOHMP was improved by the installation of a second donation box, this one in the parking lot for the Hike/Bike Trail (off South Kings Highway).

4. Increased visibility of FOHMP with elected officials of Fairfax County and the state of Virginia. Cathy and FOHMP educated many officials about the importance of healthy natural resources, such as those at the Park, protecting us from the impacts of climate change and providing important ecosystem services that we need to live healthy lives. Cathy worked hard to embed the importance of healthy natural resources into land-use decisions.

As a result of these and many more accomplishments, future generations will be able to enjoy the same (or better) Huntley Meadows Park and Historic Huntley that we enjoy today.

FOHMP's Board has asked me to act as Interim President while the Board searches for a new permanent president. (I won't say "a replacement" as there is no replacing Cathy). Regarding my role, let me first say that the first synonym for "interim" is applicable here - I am only serving as President until we have identified and installed a new permanent president, so if you are interested in the position or know anyone who would be a good fit, please reach out to me or any other member of the Board.

For those of you who don't know me, I have been visiting the Park regularly since my wife and I moved to Hollin Hills in 1991. One of the first things I did after moving was to look at a map of the area, see this big blob of green, and say to my wife, "We've got to go check out this Huntley Meadows place." We had just started birding and were immediately hooked by this special place.

The Citizen's Alliance to Save Huntley Meadows Park (CASH) was a pro bono client of the law firm where I was working at the time, and I had the opportunity to work on CASH's efforts to fight Van Dorn Phase III. It was during this time that I met the indomitable and delightful Norma Hoffman, who later asked me to join the Board of FOHMP.

I walk the Park's Hike/Bike Trail [entrance off South Kings Highway/Telegraph Road] almost every weekend, where, in addition to birding, I photograph insects and answer the questions of other visitors. I have long participated in the Park's annual Bird-a-thon. I'm the guy who at Board meetings is supportive of the staff's request for particular equipment but emphasizes that FOHMP should not be paying for toilet paper for the bathrooms - that is an obligation of Fairfax County. My day job for the last 27 years has been as an attorney for the Department of the Interior, where I supervise a team of lawyers who provide legal services to the headquarters of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

See you on the trails, and feel free to send me an email at friendsofhmp@gmail.com³ if you have any questions about FOHMP or the Board.

³<mailto:friendsofhmp@gmail.com>

Wetlands Are... Dry?



By: Karen Sheffield, Huntley Meadows Park Manager

Huntley Meadows Park's (HMP) central wetland is an ecological system that is managed based on scientific data. As a managed hemi-marsh habitat, Huntley's central wetland contains an approximately 50/50 split between emergent vegetation and open water. Hemi-marshes provide habitat for a wide diversity of flora and fauna. Multiple flora and fauna surveys, along with collected weather station data, provide vital information used to guide wetland management plans and decisions.

Management of a hemi-marsh includes annually fluctuating the timing and elevation of seasonal water levels in the wetland to prevent systematically repeated water levels that could potentially favor a specific species over diversity. This managed dynamic cycle supports the amazing diversity of vegetation and wildlife in the Park's wetland.

Over the last several years, large areas of vegetation have been overgrazed in Huntley's wetland. Our naturalists believe that Canada Geese are a significant contributor to the vegetation loss, due to the abundant numbers of geese they have recorded. Dave Lawlor, the Park's previous Natural Resource Manager, began a goose enclosure study in the wetland. You can see in the pictures below the conditions when the enclosures were first installed in 2019 and then again in 2020. The enclosure fencing demonstrates a difference in vegetation growth year on year and in 2020 inside vs. outside of the fence. Of course, these fences would also exclude some other vegetation eating species, like large snapping turtles.

To help combat the overgrazing, staff naturalists planned low water levels in the wetland for this year. Geese prefer the wetland at higher water levels with clear sight lines. Lower water levels, which promote thicker lush vegetation, could suppress the number of geese visiting HMP's wetland. Low water

levels encourage plant growth by allowing more air (specifically CO₂) to penetrate the soil, fulfilling the plant roots' need to breathe. Drier soil receives more direct sunlight, which stimulates seed germination, increasing species and total numbers of plants growing in the wetland. Such increases provide more genetic diversity to the plant populations as well as food and cover for our winter waterfowl migrants.

Periods of low wetland water, especially if the soil is exposed, drastically reduce the amount of silt (very small particles of soil) in the water. Silt is especially unwelcomed by any animal using gills to receive oxygen. Slow moving bodies of water like Huntley's wetland quickly drop out large pieces of soil (sand, gravel, etc.), but silt often remains. Dry wetlands force the silt to the wetland floor. The silt then has a chance to dry and solidify, so when the wetland next fills, the silt remains as beneficial soil providing nutrients and stability.

In early summer 2022, the HMP wetland water level was set at its lowest point for this year. Previous to the 2014 Wetland Restoration Project, there was little refuge area in the central wetland during times of low water. At present, when the water level is low, four deeper areas in the wetland provide refuges for aquatic life. These deeper pools were created as part of the Restoration Project. Wetland water levels will begin to rise as we head into fall. Find more information here:

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/huntley-meadows/wetland-restoration>.

A huge thank you goes out to all the wetland volunteers! Without the many volunteers participating in different wetland studies, Park staff would not have the amount of data available to help guide future wetland management decisions. Park staff will continue to manage Huntley's wetland water levels and flora and fauna communities in an attempt to create a robust hemi-marsh habitat that supports a diverse array of wildlife species.

Every day at Huntley is unique... I hope you enjoy your next visit!



Exclosure Site 1 2019



Exclosure Site 1 2020



Exclosure Site 2 2019



Exclosure Site 2 2020

Much Needed Shade



By: Todi Carnes, Friends of Historic Huntley (FOHH) President

Many thanks from the FOHH to Friends of Huntley Meadows Park for joining us to fund the purchase of a new activity tent (pictured above). It is already in use at Historic Huntley (HH) for summer camp kids and their adult leaders. HH campers complete the majority of their activities under this tent. At the time the photo was taken, campers were walking down to Huntley Meadows Park from HH. Thankfully, they had tented shade to greet them upon their return! Photo by Carolyn Gamble.

Welcome!



My name is Gina Sando, and I'm so excited to join the Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) team as the new Program Manager/Senior Interpreter (see above photo in which I am holding a Corn Snake). I am no stranger to Fairfax County Park Authority, having worn many hats for three years at Lake Fairfax Park as the Assistant Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, and Lakefront Programmer. I've been involved in parks and recreation for more than seven years, starting as a Natural Resources Intern at Bear Mountain State Park just north of New York City in 2015.

I worked my way up the ranks across four parks, three agencies, and two internships before arriving at HMP in May. I hold two master's degrees - Environmental Science and Energy Policy and Climate. Outside of work, I run marathons (two so far), am a backpacking enthusiast (my next adventure is the Dolly Sods Wilderness in West Virginia this fall), work on my 2022 reading challenge (I'm on book #39 of 52!), and love to curl up with my dog while attempting to teach myself to knit and crochet. If you see me around the Park, please don't hesitate to stop and say hello!

Bats - Superheroes of the Night



By: Glenda Booth, President of Friends of Dyke Marsh

Bats are often one of the most misunderstood animals. On October 26, 2022, during an online program, you can learn how bats fly with their hands, find tiny insects in complete darkness, and are responsible for humans having many of the foods and drinks we love. To learn more about these mysterious animals, sign up for a talk by Deborah Hammer, bat educator and member of the Board of Directors of both Friends of Dyke Marsh and Bat Conservation and Rescue of Virginia.

This program is sponsored by Friends of Dyke Marsh and the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park and is scheduled for October 26th at 7:00 p.m. It will be an online program. Please register in advance at:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcvceihpzsjE9YylBUxcb2KwjyOzWKvj-J1>. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the bat program.

Park Information



Huntley Meadows Park (HMP) is run and managed by the Fairfax County Park Authority. To find out more about Park hours, visitation rules, rental opportunities, and programs, visit the Parks' website at <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/huntley-meadows>.

Programs at Huntley Meadows and Historic Huntley provide a unique look at the diverse history and nature of HMP and its associated historic site. Program topics offer scouts, families, other groups, and individuals of all ages a chance to experience nature, art, and history with experts on this special natural area and historic home.

Learn more about available programs, and sign up to participate on the Park's website at: https://fairfax.usedirect.com/FairfaxFCPAWeb/ACTIVITIES/Search.aspx?place_id=7891.