

## **FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY 2016**

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Blackwater NWR is pleased to report another very successful year supporting the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The relationship between the Blackwater NWR staff, the volunteers, and the Friends of Blackwater has remained very close and has resulted in many significant contributions in support of the Refuge's needs. All funds raised by the Friends and all activities provided are used to support the Blackwater Refuge's needs and goals. Following are Friends activities over the past fiscal year – October 1, 2015 through September 30, 2016:

- ) The Cooperative Environmental Education Program with the Dorchester County Public School's fourth and sixth grades continued in its ninth year. Beth Burgess, our Environmental Education Committee Chair, coordinated the activities led by Refuge staff, volunteers, and our partners, Pickering Creek Audubon Center and Maryland DNR Park Service. This year, a total of 731 students visited Blackwater NWR. The FOB is providing annual funding for transportation and this year also purchased marsh plants for the program. Since it began in 2007, a total of 6241 students have participated in this program! FOB is currently looking at expanding our educational efforts by partnering with the Mid-Atlantic Monarch Initiative to promote Monarch butterfly conservation.
- ) The Eagle's Nest Bookstore, managed by Charlotte Hehn, continued to be the major source of funds for Refuge projects and programs, providing almost half of our available funds! In lieu of holding a FOB Christmas Open House in December, this year we offered a "Everyone's a Friend" 10% discount on ALL purchases for the entire month. Both Jed and Heather Scrimshaw, Assistant Bookstore Managers, resigned last spring. Charlotte resigned from the Board in March, but is continuing to manage the Bookstore through December 2016. She has recruited the following Product Managers to manage our inventory: Mary Lynch, Carol Clarke, Elaine Wilson, June Middleton, Lynda Hicken, Carol & Ed Walker, Betsy McCaul & Art Smith, and Wolf & Charlotte Hehn (temporarily). A couple more Product Managers are still needed! The Board has recruited Sue Fischer to become the new Bookstore General Manager based upon her availability in January 2017. Many thanks to all of you as we work through this transition!
- ) In November 2015, a Weather Station was installed in the Visitor Center (VC) and snow/ice guards were installed on the roof of the VC entrance.
- ) Also in November, another Portable Public Address System was purchased.
- ) In March, the Friends provided funding and support for the Refuge's 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Eagle Festival. Approximately 1400 people attended. In August, a Maryland Heritage Area Authority Mini-Grant of \$1525 was approved for the 2017 Eagle Festival.
- ) Also in March, the Friends supported the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Competition for Maryland now held at Blackwater NWR. Organized by Ranger Tom Miller, volunteer judges selected a Maryland winner, Kathy Liu of Potomac, for this national competition. This will become an annually funded event for FOB.

- ) In April, the Friends supported the Refuge Volunteer Recognition Dinner held at the Elk's Lodge.
- ) Our Scholarship Committee, chaired by Wolf Hehn, did a superb job this year. With the scholarship residency requirement expanded to the entire State of Maryland, many more applications were received. This year, the Board voted to give four scholarships totaling \$9000.00 to deserving students. Erika Koontz, a student at Washington College, was awarded a \$3000.00 scholarship. Suzanne Sullivan, a student at Salisbury University, was awarded \$3000.00. Olivia Gullledge, a student at McDaniel College, received \$2000.00. Kathryn Hutcheson, a student at the University of Maryland College Park, received \$1000.00. The Board voted to allow second year students in a new Garrett College Natural Resources and Wildlife Technology Program eligibility for our scholarship program. Wolf resigned from the Board at the end of his term in September, but is continuing to volunteer on the committee through December 2016. The Board has recruited Harry Heckathorn as the new Scholarship Committee Chair.
- ) In May, a new water cooler bottle filler with a filtration system was installed in the VC west wing hallway. It is very popular with Refuge bikers and hikers!
- ) Also in May, the Friends held the 8<sup>th</sup> Wild Goose Chase (WGC) women's bicycle ride. Cathy Beise, Event Committee Chair, and about 40 Friends volunteers were on hand to make the event a success. A total of 429 ladies registered for the ride, with 380 actually attending. The WGC has been a significant source of funds for many Refuge projects but requires an enormous volunteer effort for those funds.
- ) The Board is happy to announce the recruitment of Elaine Webster to help with special fundraising initiatives.
- ) The Friends supported the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Fishing Fun Day in June by supplying giveaway items, T-shirts, bait, lunch, and other supplies. Over 50 kids attended this popular event. Any excess supplies were used at the Eastern Neck NWR Fishing Event the following week.
- ) The Refuge staff now handles the administration of the Hunt Program. The Friends updated our agreement with "Friendly Hunt Services" (Allen Johnston) to assist the Refuge with the program management. In addition to buying hunting permits, many Blackwater hunters also join the FOB. Thank you, hunters! The Friends also purchased gravel for road/culvert maintenance at the Unit M2 property off Smithville Rd., also known as Moneystump.
- ) The Friends website continues to be maintained by Webmaster Lisa Mayo with assistance from Cathy Beise. The website has just been updated to make it more mobile device friendly. In addition, biographies and photos of our Board members were added to the website this year. In February, Lisa was officially made a member of the Board. A new laptop was purchased for her use in April. Lisa also continues to manage our Twitter, You-Tube, and Facebook accounts and we now have over 7200 Facebook fans! Since the Fish & Wildlife Service has revamped Refuge websites, Lisa no longer maintains the Blackwater NWR website. Refuge Ranger Tom Miller is now handling that. Our FOB website has links to the Refuge website. Lisa and Cathy continue to keep our FOB members and others informed through our e-newsletters.
- ) The eagle and osprey cameras, available on-line, are overseen by Lisa Mayo and Tom Hook. They continue to be highly popular, especially during the nesting season.

Unfortunately, this spring the osprey cam stopped working just as the nesting season began. In September, after two chicks fledged, we installed a new camera. Sadly, this year we again lost our eagle chicks. For unknown reasons, the eagles left the eggs unattended for an extended period and they apparently froze. We are in a “wait and see” mode to see if the nest has been abandoned. We attempted to remedy interference on the eagle cam by installing a new Uninterrupted Power Supply. We are still working on getting a FIOS line to the Visitor Center for streaming video.

- ) Annual expenses for the Butterfly and Beneficial Insect Garden were covered by the Friends. This included purchase of new plants and mulch. In March, Janet Kerr, our FOB Grant Writer, successfully secured a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant (\$9250 w/\$2370 FOB match) to expand the garden with a walkway to the VC west wing, additional plants, rain barrels, drainage improvements, and new signage.
- ) In July, we were awarded a Maryland Heritage Area Authority Easy Grant (\$5000 w/\$5000 FOB match) to upgrade our paddling trails. Work on two new kiosks with informational signage and directional signage for the waterways is in progress.
- ) Lois McKenzie, our Library Committee Chair, moved to Florida in August 2016. The Library shelves are now at capacity and no new donations are being accepted. Thanks to all who have helped fill those shelves! Maintenance of the Library will become a Refuge Service Volunteer opportunity.
- ) Written testimonies to both the Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and the Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack were submitted by the Friends advocating support of funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Letters and emails were also sent to Senator Barbara Mikulski and Representative Andy Harris supporting Refuge System funding.
- ) A “FOB Historical Timeline”, first written by Maggie Briggs, was updated by Rick Abend. Copies are available to anyone interested. In FY17, FOB will be celebrating 30 years of Refuge support!
- ) Two significant donations need to be noted. This year the Friends received a \$20,000 bequest from the Estate of Carey Cansler Roberts in honor of her friend Dr. Robert Berberich, Jr. The Friends also received over \$8,000 in memorial donations “in lieu of flowers” in memory of Beverly Jo Etheridge Addison. FOB is very honored and thankful. These donations will go a long way toward completing current Refuge Wish List items.
- ) To promote FOB Board development, three workshops were attended. In October, Secretary Janet Kerr attended a National Wildlife Refuge Association Friends Workshop at Chincoteague NWR in Virginia. In January, President Rick Abend, along with Blackwater NWR Visitor Services Manager Ray Paterra, attended the Friends Forward Conference at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV (along with 42.5” of snow!). In August, Janet Kerr attended the Friends Academy at NCTC. Janet arranged for two webinars on Board Governance and Fundraising to be held during two of our monthly Board meetings. A new FOB Organizational Handbook is being compiled by Rick Abend for new Board member orientation.
- ) Our volunteers are the backbone of our organization. In September, FOB held a Volunteer Appreciation Crab Feast at the new Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad

State Park Pavilion for both FOB and Refuge Service Volunteers who have helped out over the past year. Thank you all!

- ) To promote FOB membership, a new brochure was developed by Lisa Mayo and Rick Abend. Along with an application, the brochure highlights Friends support of the Refuge.
- ) The Friends awarded Life Memberships to Maggie Briggs who retired from the Board in Sep 2015 and to retiring Deputy Project Leader, BNWR, Larry McGowan, for his service at Blackwater NWR for the past 14 years.
- ) One of our membership benefits, a 10% discount at the Island Grille Restaurant on Taylors Island, was lost due to closure of the restaurant. However, Millie's at Madison Bay on MD Rt. 16 in Madison, MD is now offering FOB members a 10% discount on food orders. Thank you, Millie! We hope FOB members can take advantage of all of our membership benefits – especially the 10% discount on purchases at our Eagle's Nest Bookstore!
- ) While we started out the fiscal year with a total of 686 memberships, including 59 life memberships, Janet Shields, our Vice-President and Membership Committee Chairperson, reports a year-end total of 809 memberships, including 62 life memberships, in the Friends of Blackwater. Much of this increase was due to membership drives held during the Eagle Festival and Wild Goose Chase. Our book, "What A River Says" was given as a gift during these drives. Our membership has increased for the fourth consecutive year!

We want to continue our successful relationship between the Refuge and the Friends in the coming years. We also want to thank all who have worked with us over the years for their contribution of skills, time and donations enabling the completion of so many projects and we highly encourage all of our members to volunteer. We need you now more than ever!

All funds and activities provided by the Friends are used in cooperation with and direct support of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. Overall, the financial position of the Friends of Blackwater is quite strong.

Sincerely,

Rick Abend  
President, Friends of Blackwater