

FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY 2017

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, 2016 through September 30, 2017:

- The Cooperative Environmental Education Program with the Dorchester County Public School's fourth and sixth grades continued in its tenth 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 712 students visited Blackwater NWR as part of this program. The FOB is providing annual funding for transportation and this year also purchased 1500 milkweed plants for the 6th grade to plant. Since it began in 2007, a total of 6953 students have participated in this program!
- The Eagle's Nest Bookstore, managed by Sue Fischer, continued to be the major source of funds for Refuge projects and programs, providing almost half of our available funds! Up to \$6000 of Bookstore profits are also dedicated annually to our Scholarship Program. For the second year, we offered a "Everyone's a Friend" 10% discount on ALL purchases for the entire month of December. We did the same thing in September as part of our 30th Anniversary celebration. FOB members received a 20% discount on purchases. Water bottles commemorating our anniversary were also given out. The most exciting news in the Bookstore is that we had a new Point-Of-Sale system installed! The Clover system will simplify sales, track inventory and generate reports with ease. Volunteer training is almost complete. Sue has the help of Kit Bradshaw and a whole cast of volunteer Product Managers to help keep things running smoothly. Thank you all!
- In March, the Friends provided funding and support for the Refuge's 17th Annual Eagle Festival. Approximately 850 people attended on a very blustery day! A \$1525 Maryland Heritage Area Authority Mini-Grant also provided part of the funding. FOB also purchased three new tripods for the Eagle Prowls and other uses.
- Two telescopes in the 2nd floor observatory were replaced. The new scopes have zoom lenses.
- Also in March, for the second year, 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 for this national competition.
- In April, the Friends supported the Refuge Volunteer Recognition Dinner held at the Elk's Lodge. In 2016, 192 volunteers donated 10,003 hours, equivalent to nearly five full-time staff. That's true volunteer power!
- Also in April, FOB partnered with several other businesses/organizations to help the Dorchester County Tourism Office secure a \$50,000 grant. Blackwater NWR has been

the number one tourist attraction in the county. With the opening this year of the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center adjacent to the Refuge, visitation to the Refuge is expected to increase significantly.

- In May, two Canon copiers (B/W) were purchased for the Refuge Visitor Center and Headquarters. FOB uses the VC copier when necessary. The Refuge provides the maintenance contracts.
- Also in May, Cathy Beise and Elaine Webster helped coordinate a “bridge event” held by Potomac Pedalers Touring Club in lieu of not having the Women’s Wild Goose Chase this year. The event was held at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park Pavilion and PPTC provided FOB with a \$675 donation. Thank you!
- Our Scholarship Committee is chaired by Harry Heckathorn. In November, the Scholarship Application forms were updated in doc., docx, and pdf formats. In January, our Scholarship Brochure was updated. Three scholarships totaling \$6000.00 were awarded to deserving students pursuing degrees in environmental sciences. Jacob Shaner of Cambridge, MD, a University of Maryland College Park student pursuing a master degree in Ecological Systems, was awarded a \$3000.00 scholarship. Warren Staver of Centerville, MD, a student at Worcester Poly-Technic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts majoring in Environmental Engineering, was awarded \$2000.00. Elizabeth Truitt of Bishopville, MD, a student at University of Maryland College Park majoring in Environmental Science and Policy, received \$1000.00. The total money awarded through our Scholarship Program since 2012 is now \$27,000.
- Ron Ketter officially joined the Board in July. Ron is taking over the job of FOB Treasurer as Tom Hook steps down after 20 years!
- Elaine Webster, Committee Chair for Special Fundraising Initiatives, resigned from the Board at the end of her term due to work and time constraints.
- The Friends supported the 15th Annual Youth Fishing Fun Day in June by supplying giveaway items, T-shirts, bait, lunch, and other supplies. FOB also purchased larger fish to stock the pond for the kids. Sixty-five kids attended this popular event. For the first time, the Refuge partnered with the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and used their pavilion and parking area. The first few snakehead fish were caught in Hog Range Pond! (How many of “our” fish did they eat!?) Any excess supplies were used at the Eastern Neck NWR Fishing Event the following week.
- The Friends continued support of the Refuge Hunt Program. We partnered with the Maryland Bowhunting Society and Union Sportsman Alliance to fund a deer survey on the Refuge by the University of Delaware. We also provided refreshments at the April Hunter Meeting.
- FOB funded installation of multiple high speed fiber optic lines for the Refuge. FOB also has separate connectivity. In addition, the Friends is also now providing public WIFI in the Visitor Center.
- The Friends website continues to be maintained by Webmaster Lisa Mayo with assistance from Cathy Beise. In addition to links to the Refuge website, our FOB website also has links for Harriet Tubman information. Lisa also continues to manage our social media accounts. We now have 7604 Facebook fans, 991 Twitter followers, and 112 Instagram followers. There are 2530 newsletter subscribers (FOB members and others) being kept informed through our e-newsletters.

- The eagle and osprey cameras, available on-line, are overseen by Lisa Mayo and Tom Hook. The cam pages continue to get the most hits on our website, especially during the nesting season. Unfortunately, the eagles did not use the nest this year. We have had the camera on this nest since 2004. We are investigating the possibility of using a different nest along Wildlife Drive for the web cam. Now that we have FIOS connectivity in the Visitor Center, we will be re-booting our efforts to provide streaming video for our cameras.
- Annual expenses for the Butterfly and Beneficial Insect Garden were covered by the Friends. This included purchase of new plants and mulch.
- A Maryland Heritage Area Authority Easy Grant (\$5000 w/\$5000 FOB match) obtained by Janet Kerr, our Grant Committee Chair, is being used to upgrade our paddling trails. Work on two kiosks at the put-in sites with informational signage and additional directional signage for the waterways is in progress and will be completed in November 2017.
- Written testimonies, emails, and phone calls to our political representatives were submitted by the Friends advocating Refuge System support, support of funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and opposition to proposed Refuge System budget cuts.
- A new FOB Organizational Handbook for Board member orientation and reference was completed in February. It is being maintained by Cathy Beise. To promote FOB Board development, one workshop was attended. In September, Cathy Beise, Events Committee Chair, attended a Northeast Regional Friends Training in Alexandria, VA. In the past, monthly Board meetings were always held on the third Tuesday of the month. For FY2017, to increase Board meeting attendance, four Saturday meetings were scheduled during the months of November, February, May and August. In addition, Board members could call in if unable to attend. We will continue with this new schedule.
- Our volunteers are the backbone of our organization. In September, FOB held our 2nd Annual 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. Over 60 volunteers attended. Thank you all – and also those who could not attend!
- The Friends awarded Life Memberships to past Board members Wolf and Charlotte Hehn for their many years of service.
- While we started out the fiscal year with a total of 809 memberships, Janet Shields, our Vice-President and Membership Committee Chair, reports a year-end total of 811 memberships, including 62 life memberships, in the Friends of Blackwater. Our membership has increased for the fifth 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