

**FRIENDS OF BLACKWATER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, INC.
ANNUAL REPORT FOR FY 2025**

The Board of Directors of the Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. (FOB) is pleased to report that our 38th year supporting the Blackwater NWR has been very successful. The relationship between the Refuge staff, the volunteers, and the Friends of Blackwater has remained very close and has resulted in many accomplishments in support of the Refuge. All funds raised by the Friends and all activities provided are used to support the needs and goals of Blackwater NWR and the Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Following are Friends activities over the past fiscal year – October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025:

- Eagle’s Nest Bookstore
 - The Bookstore is located in the Visitor Center (VC) in prime space provided by the Refuge and is operated in accordance with our partnership agreement. Volunteers provided guidance to visitors on ways to experience the Refuge, as well as opportunities to purchase educational and interpretive merchandise to enhance the visitors’ experience. The net income for FY25 was just under \$26,000 and continued to be a major source of funds for Refuge projects and programs.
- Wild Goose Chase
 - The bicycle ride through the refuge and surrounding areas of Dorchester County provided a unique, women focused cycling event to raise awareness of the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The weekend long event provides workshops, and interpretative events in the Refuge and culminates with 18-, 31-, and 63-mile rides on Sunday. This year there were 232 registered riders and generated net proceeds of just over \$11,000.
- Photo Contest
 - This year’s Photo Contest produced some stunning photographs of the Refuge. There were 182 submissions in the four categories of Wildlife, Flora and Macro, Landscapes and Waterscapes, and Nightscapes. The submissions were judged, and monetary prizes were awarded. Prize winning photographs were displayed in the VC.
- Membership and Donations
 - FOB ended FY2025 with 454 members. The Membership Working Group was very active this year implementing a new CRM software tool for managing information about members, donors, and other interested supporters. Maureen Long’s exhaustive effort was key to creating the data set to be used in DonorSnap for actively managing memberships, fundraising, and marketing to advocate and provide financial support to the Refuge.
- Bird Strike Window Treatment
 - This project involves applying film on the large windows of the VC that makes the windows visible to flying birds. We found a vendor and are exploring

opportunities for additional funding to offset the costs. We realistically expect this project to be completed in FY26.

- Chronolog
 - FOB continued supporting the Chronolog Citizen Scientist Project with a camera mount placed out on the elevated observation platform. Visitors can take a picture from the mount and upload it to help create a long-term time-lapse of the ecosystem. Active since 2021, 1138 contributors submitted 1448 photos. This project is documenting the slow but steady impact of sea level rise on Blackwater NWR habitat.
- Environmental Education
 - Funding for the Refuge's Environmental Education Program for 4th and 6th grade Dorchester County students continued. We had 310 4th graders attend in October, and 350 6th graders attend in April, for a total of 660 students. Since 2007, 11,212 students have visited the Refuge as part of this program. FOB provides all bus transportation and materials and equipment needed for their activities. Thanks to the army of volunteers and Refuge staff who make this program so successful!
- Eagle and Osprey Cameras
 - Our Cam Team stayed busy maintaining five wildlife cameras. A summer lightning strike destroyed the Waterfowl Camera, its microphone and the associated electronics. The two radio frequency transmitter/receivers and the solar power systems survived the strike. Luckily, this allowed transmission on our RF communication network that supported the River Camera, which remains in operation. The two eagle nest cameras continued operation and viewed numerous raptors, but neither eagles nor owls claimed the nest this year. The Friends also supported live AV cameras on two Osprey nests. The novice osprey parents returned this year to the land nest; three eggs were laid. Two eggs hatched and both chicks fledged in early August. The more skilled pair returned and laid three eggs; all hatched and two survived to fledge. A fifth camera observed migratory waterfowl in the impoundment pond behind the VC. Bob Quinn continued his support of our communications systems, in the field, in the VC, and with our internet service provider. He also controlled the cameras and archived the audio-video information used for our social media pages. Harry Heckathorn and Steve Levin serviced the cameras and power systems in the field and investigated upgrades to the three raptor cameras due to the lightning strike and age. FOB appreciates the talent, dedication, and expertise of Bob, Harry and Steve!
- Communication
 - Social media is the primary means of sharing FOB news and Refuge wildlife activity captured by the Refuge cameras and by visiting photographers. Lisa Mayo, our social media manager and accomplished photographer, kept cam followers updated about nest action on the FOB's Facebook, Instagram and YouTube accounts as well as through the FOB's email newsletter. The live video with audio, posted on the Friends of Blackwater website, is very popular and is enjoyed worldwide.

- Eagle Fest 2025
 - Unfortunately, due to the HPAI virus (duck flu) that was present within our state, the 2025 Eagle Festival was cancelled. The FOB is hopeful that the 2026 Eagle Fest will return and bring this inspirational and educational venue back.
- Exhibit Renovation – Second Floor
 - Financial support for the much-needed renovation of the second floor was approved by the FOB this summer and we are hopeful it will begin in the next fiscal year.
- Youth Fishing Fun Day
 - The 22st Annual Youth Fishing Fun Day was enjoyed by 50 children in June. FOB supplied giveaway items, T-shirts, bait, and lunch. This event continues to be one of our best family fun days of the year! Thank you, volunteers!
- Visitor Center/ Headquarters Building Cleaning
 - FOB continued funding the weekly cleaning of the common areas in the VC and Headquarters Building by 20/20 Cleaning Services.
- Volunteer Support and Awards Banquet
 - Volunteers are the backbone of our FOB organization and the Refuge. This year, the Refuge’s Volunteer Awards Banquet supported by FOB was again held at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park pavilion. While we have never counted the thousands of hours contributed directly toward FOB activities, the Refuge has always tracked volunteer hours for Refuge activities. Michele Whitbeck reported that in 2025 there were 9,180 hours contributed to the Refuge by 134 volunteers. The award for Volunteer of the Year went to two wonderful individuals: Lynda Hicken and Vicki Zoebel!
- Staff Support
 - FOB provided funding for a summer intern to support Blackwater VC staff.
- Milky Way Photography
 - In 2025, the FOB offered a Milky Way Photography Workshop run by night sky photographer Robert Sullivan as a fundraiser. Twenty participants enjoyed an evening of night sky photography along Wildlife Drive.
- Butterfly Pollination Garden
 - FOB supported maintenance of the VC’s Beneficial Insect and Butterfly Garden. The Garden is a popular opportunity for our guests to learn about native plants as well as experience many native fauna, such as toads, tree frogs, and a multitude of insects and birds that frequent this space. Our volunteers keep it in tip-top shape!
- Junior Duck Stamp Competition
 - For the tenth year, FOB supported the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Competition for Maryland held at Blackwater NWR in February. Organized by Ranger Tom Miller, volunteer judges selected a Maryland winner for this national competition. Some of the talent we see is just amazing. Thank you judges and other volunteers who assisted!
- Litter Pick-up
 - Another litter pick-up day was scheduled for BWR in 2025, and it was a success again removing litter and blown-in debris from the Refuge.
- Night Sky Tour

- The FOB Night Sky Tours, conducted by Harry Heckathorn and Bob Quinn, have been very popular. This educational program is held one clear weather evening during an 11-day window around the new moon. During FY25, 11 programs drew a total of 450 attendees. Attendees witnessed real-time views from the telescope and heard authoritative descriptions of the objects observed. Subsequently, some of the captured images are expertly processed to improve color and contrast and remove artifacts such as those caused by artificial satellites. Attendees are notified where to view and download the improved images. Monthly invitations are sent to over 834 email addresses representing approximately 1300 individuals. A film crew from Maryland Public Television (MPT) attended the tour held in April (#26). Interviews and imagery will be broadcast on MPT's Outdoors Maryland in November 2025.
- Volunteer Update Lunch
 - Lunch was provided by FOB for the Refuge's annual Volunteer Update held in August. This event is always well attended and not only provides our volunteers with the latest information but also seeks to attract new volunteers for the Refuge and FOB.
- Water Sample – Horns Point Lab
 - FOB continued funding the cost of the water sample testing by the Horn Point Environmental Laboratory. Refuge volunteers, led by Ron Ketter, performed water sampling at 4 different sites around the Refuge.
- Distinguished Lecturer Series (DLS)
 - The FOB Board embarked on a new fundraising and friend-raising program this year called the Distinguished Lecturer Series. The pilot presentation was well received with our speaker Dr. Donald Neiffer, head veterinarian with the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. To enhance the program with our target audience, the DLS working group created a survey to ascertain the interests of our guests. This survey is guiding our choices for the year 2026, with evening lectures occurring quarterly.
- Refuge Advocacy
 - The FOB Advocacy Committee, spearheaded by Lisa Mayo, produced a web page for the FOB website outlining how U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget and staff reductions dramatically impacted the refuge. The FOB used the web page, social media posts, and newsletter updates to keep supporters informed on recent federal government actions and how citizens could show support for the refuge. In addition, the FOB Advocacy Committee met with the offices of U.S. Senators Chris Van Hollen and Angela Alsobrooks of Maryland about these same issues and discussed them with the Eastern Shore staffer for Representative Andy Harris. The FOB Advocacy Committee also worked in concert with the Friends of Eastern Neck NWR to better advocate for Maryland's refuges.

As FOB moves into its 39th year, we want to continue our successful relationship between the Refuge and the Friends. We also want to thank all who 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 our members to volunteer. We need you now more than ever!

An overall summary of the income and expenditures for FY 2025 prepared by Treasurer Jill Levin is available upon request. 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 FOB continues to be robust and our commitment has never been stronger.

Sincerely,

Cindy Burns
President
Friends of Blackwater